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JULIUS CAESAR. PLUTARCH'S LIVES. AUTOBIOGRAPHY. LITERATURE CURRICULUM IV, TEACHER VERSION.

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THIS 10TH-GRADE ENGLISH CURRICULUM GUIDE WAS PREPARED TO ASSIST TEACHERS IN THE PRESENTATION OF AN ENRICHED READING AND STUDY PROGRAM OF SHAKESPEARE'S "JULIUS CAESAR," GIVING SOME ATTENTION TO PLUTARCH'S BIOGRAPHIES OF CAESAR, BRUTUS, AND MARK ANTONY WHICH BEAR DIRECTLY ON SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY. AN INSTRUCTIONAL UNIT ON "AUTOBIOGRAPHY" WAS INCLUDED WITH STUDY QUESTIONS AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS DESIGNED FOR TEACHER USE IN HELPING STUDENTS RELATE THEIR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES TO THOSE OF PROMINENT LITERARY ARTISTS. THE STUDENT VERSION OF THIS GUIDE IS ED 010 817. RELATED REPORTS ARE ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160 AND ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832. (JH)

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JULIUS CAESAR.
PLUTARCH'S LIVES.
AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

Literature Curriculum IV,
Teacher Version,

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OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

Literature Curriculum IV

Teacher Version

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

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I. Introduction: Julius Caesar and The Merchant of Venice

Julius Caesar is the second Shakespearian play to be studied in our four-year sequence. In subject, theme, and dramatic treatment, it is radically different from The Merchant of Venice,, read in the ninth grade, and some class discussion of the differences should give students an understanding, early in their experience with Shakespeare, of the many-sidedness of his genius.

That "comedy" and this "tragedy" were, however, written by the same man. A problem, then, can be defined: although the plays are obviously different, in what ways is the mark of the man nevertheless on both of them? What traits of style or structure, what characteristics of vision, what psychological conceptions do they seem to have in common?

The Merchant of Venice was probably first acted in 1596, Julius Caesar in 1599. Five plays, including the great trilogy, Henry IV, Parts I and II, and Henry V, came between, the experience of writing them presumably maturing Shakespeare's art. Can students, then, find ways of supporting the proposition that Julius Caesar is a greater play than The Merchant of Venice? Or will they deny that it is and find reasons for that? Or will they prefer to say that perhaps Julius Caesar is greater but nevertheless not as interesting or enjoyable as the earlier play? Can a greater play be less interesting than one inferior to it? What are the identifying marks of greatness? Who decides?

The understanding such questions may lead to is an important objective in the study not only of Shakespeare but of literature in general. As we grow in literary experience the concept of "appreciation" broadens and deepens. We begin with single works, trying to grasp each in turn, to understand and enjoy it. When we read a second and then a third and fourth work by the same author, our appreciation, still of course rooted in the individual works, at the same time somehow extends to appreciation of the author. We find an almost bewildering variety in him: we begin to have some sense of the restless energy of genius, which constantly seeks new challenges, sets new problems, for itself. Shakespeare was not one man, but many men.

Then we look more deeply and in spite of the differences see the similarities that unify the plays and poems. Shakespeare was not many men but one.

Reading the plays in the order of their composition, we may then come to understand that they represent a growth, a deepening of vision and refining of art that came with increased experience in his craft. Shakespeare was one man, then, but he changed, matured, like all of us.

But such statements seem to assume principles of taste and judgment. So we try to define those principles, not so much in order to judge, although intelligent discrimination is important, but in order to sharpen appreciation. The development of principles of taste is an empirical process. Standards are not handed down from above on some prophet-critic's Mt. Sinai. They are developed slowly from the experience of reading itself.

Such propositions and their attendant questions can be introduced early in the study of Julius Caesar, and pursued, without forcing them too much, to the end of it. We ourselves shall return to them later. Let us now, however, turn to another kind of question, which is prompted by the subject of this play.

II. Literature and History

Broadly conceived, the subject of Julius Caesar is political action. The source is history. The first section of the introductory material in the Folger edition has the title, "The Appeal of Roman History," and the first sentence somewhat fancifully refers to the moment "when Shakespeare picked up his Plutarch and began to dig out material for a play about Julius Caesar." What is the significance of this?

The word history itself may be given some preliminary attention. When we say that the source of the play is history, we may mean only that it is about something that happened in the past, in a time hardly less remote from Shakespeare's age than from ours. Or we may mean that its source is Plutarch, that is, a written record of what happened in the past. Caesar was assassinated in 44 B. C. That is history in the first sense. Sometime after the event, Plutarch wrote about it. His essay on Caesar is "history" in the second sense: historical writing. Historical writing is a special branch of literature.

In the ninth grade, our students read Mark Twain's Roughing It, a partly "true" account of a trip westward across the Great Plains and the Rockies the author made in the early 1860's. They saw then that the ultimate source of that book was history, the history of the great American migration called the Westward Movement; some of them perhaps came to understand that what is called "literature" may often be hardly separable from what is called "history."

In the tenth grade we are giving some further attention to the relationship between history and literature and to historical writing itself. We encounter "history" in an early form in the Odyssey, for instance, when the bard Demodocus "sings of the gods and episodes from the great war at Troy," his song serving to remind us that history in one of its manifestations is memory. The Odyssey as a whole, as the guide to that epic makes clear, is also an historical record (although of course not intended as such) of the culture of the Homeric Age, its class structure, religious observances, the "apparatus of government," etc. In this grade we are also reading some short modern biographies, representing a literary-historical mode to which Plutarch is probably still the most famous contributor. It seems appropriate, then, in connection with the reading of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar to give some attention to Plutarch's work--at least to those passages in his biographies of Caesar, Brutus, and Antony which bear most directly and obviously on Shakespeare's play.

It is probably best to do this after the study of the play has been completed, although some students may wish, independently, at least to dip into the Plutarch selections concurrently with the reading of the play. Two major uses of the Plutarch material are recommended.

First, in some passages of the play Shakespeare stays pretty close to the language of his source (in North's translation of 1579, of course). What differences of effect, then, between the prose of North's Plutarch and the verse of Shakespeare will the students be able to detect? Their speculations on this question should help to sharpen their awareness of the special qualities of poetry.

The second question is related to the first: how in a broader sense are Shakespeare's intentions in writing the play and Plutarch's in writing "history" similar, and how are they different? Do we feel differently about Shakespeare's Caesar and Brutus and Antony than we do about Plutarch's ? Why? What, then, seem to be the basic differences--or some of them--between literature and history, between "tragedy" and history (since in the First Folio of 1623 Julius Caesar was listed with the "Tragedies" and not with the "Histories," a category reserved exclusively for the plays about the English kings)?

We shall return to this later, after a careful reading of the play itself. Before moving on to it, however, an important point must be made about the nature of historical writing, the historical imagination.

Good historians have never thought of themselves as only patient recorders of facts; they have been primarily concerned with the ordering of the facts into patterns that will make sense of them, they have been and are concerned with interpretation. Their facts are facts of human behavior at particular times and in particular places; and since they are human facts, human motives and human psychology are a part of the historian's subject. Historians are of course concerned with social institutions--states and religions and armies and class relationships and all the rest of it. They sometimes try to formulate "laws" that seem super-personal and are intended to explain historical change; but the "laws" themselves must take account of the personal forces that are always at work in history. Thus the interests of the historian and of the literary artist often seem indistinguishable.

This leads to another obvious comment that is nevertheless important if we are to read Julius Caesar with complete understanding. It is thought that facts are indisputable, that there can be no disagreement about facts. This is a rough-and-ready proposition that need not now be argued. But when interpretation begins, disputes and disagreements follow. The history of "history" is a history of argument and debate.

In the case of Caesar, however, the disagreements were largely a matter of emphasis. In nearly all of the historical writers known to educated Elizabethans--and there were available medieval and contemporary "authorities" as well as classical writers like Plutarch--the "debate" appears as a divided attitude; there is on the one hand, as Ernest Schanzer says, "the keenest admiration for Caesar's personal qualities" and, on the other, "the strongest abhorrence of his political pursuits" (The Problem Plays of Shakespeare, New York, 1963). The differences of emphasis stem at least in part from the degree of the writer's devotion to Republic "liberties" or to the contrary belief in the necessity of strong rule as a guarantee of social order. This conscious ambivalence, which is felt strongly in Shakespeare's play, is characteristic of the historians and their educated readers only. Popular tradition is another matter; in that, during both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, "Caesar was extolled and his assassins execrated" (Shanzer). The most famous expression in this view is of course found in the lowest circle of Dante's Inferno, where Brutus and Cassius are champed in the jaws of three-faced Satan; their companion in that eternal mastication is Judas Iscariot.

III. Julius Caesar: the Political Situation at the Beginning

The period of Rome's ancient kingship ended when the Republic was founded in 509 B.C. by Lucius Junius Brutus, the great namesake of the Marcus Brutus of our play. The Republic lasted for nearly 500 years--until, that is, Julius Caesar's grand-nephew Octavius Caesar, having first joined with Antony and Lepidus to defeat the armies of Brutus and Cassius in 42 B.C. (Act V of our play), and later having eliminated both Lepidus and Antony as military and political rivals, assumed the title of the Emperor Augustus in 27 B.C.

Although the principle of elective representative government was still observed in the Roman Republic at the time of the opening of Julius Caesar, the outlines of the old constitution had been considerably blurred by forces unleashed by the Republic's long history of nationalistic expansion and the political power won by a series of great generals who were the engineers of that expansion. The office of Consul (there could be as many as three of them), the highest the system had to offer, was still elective, but the Consul or Consuls could be superseded in times of crisis by a Dictator with nearly absolute powers. Rome had been repeatedly torn by civil strife: strife between the aristocratic ("Republic" did not then, as it does now, exclude the aristocratic principle) and popular parties (Caesar began his career as a leader of the latter), and strife between rival military leaders, whose armies generally gave allegiance to them rather than to the state.

Some years before the beginning of Shakespeare's play the generals Pompey the Great and Caesar had emerged as the two strongest contenders for political supremacy in Rome. The civil war that finally broke out between them ended with the defeat of Pompey in 48 B.C. This issued in Caesar's dictatorship and his assumption of the title of Imperator.

The life dictatorship was granted him early in 44 B. C. He had in those few years been a benevolent autocrat, granting amnesty to the followers of Pompey (both Brutus and Cassius were among them) and instituting economic and administrative reforms: he never quite abandoned his old role as popular leader. Yet many Republican aristocrats and die-hard former followers of Pompey like Brutus and Cassius and the Flavius and Marulus of the first scene of our play grew increasingly concerned about Caesar's further ambitions. They were animated, as the play quickly reveals, by different motives, often far from selfless; but they could be momentarily united by their common hatred of the title Rex, or King, which they thought Caesar might any day assume. This is the situation when the play gets under way.

IV. The Play

Instead of conducting our discussion of Julius Caesar under such headings as Subject, Form, Point of View, etc., it seems wise now to emphasize the organic unity of the work by moving through it as it is actually read or seen in the theater. Act and scene divisions will be used for convenient reference, but, as students learned in their study of The Merchant of Venice, these divisions misrepresent the way in which the action of the Shakespearian play should flow in continuous movement on the stage (as it did in Globe productions and does in nearly all productions today). Therefore we shall view the play not as divided into five acts but as composed of three main "phases" or movements which cut across the act divisions of the printed text. At times we shall interrupt the commentary on the action for brief considerations of various aspects of theme, treatment, and effect. Here are our three phases:

First Phase: Caesar and the "Seduction" of Brutus

4 scenes: Act I through Act II, Scene 1

Second Phase: The Assassination and the Triumph of Antony

6 scenes: Act II, Scene 2, through Act III

Third Phase: Consequences: the Revenge of Caesar

8 scenes: Acts IV and V

This scheme represents the play's structural pattern, designed on the principle of the reversal. The Second Phase is crucial (crux, cross, misery). The conspiracy planned in the First Phase seems successful when Caesar lies dead in Act III, Scene 1. "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!" Antony's funeral oration turns the tables. "We'll burn the house of Brutus. . . Come, seek the conspirators." The hunters become the hunted and are brought to bay and destroyed in the Third Phase.

I - 1 ("Day of the Rabblement")

The Roman commoners play an important role in the play's first two phases. Their force is applied at two decisive moments: when three times they cheer Caesar (and anger him, if Casca is to be believed) for refusing the crown offered him by Antony; and when they are turned into a murderous mob by Antony's shrewd oratorical manipulation of them in Act III, Scene 2. Although Shakespeare at times (most memorably in King Lear) reveals a humane sympathy for the suffering of the very poor, the common man in his political aspect always appears in the plays as at once contemptible and dangerous--Alexander Hamilton's "great beast": fickle, unreasoning, greedy, short-memoried, with "soles" forever unmended.

There is some irony in Shakespeare's portrayal in this scene of Flavius and Marullus, "tribunes of the people." The office of the tribuni plebis was one of the most ancient institutions of the Roman Republic, founded in 494 B. C. Annually elected, the ten tribunes were the official guardians of the privileges and welfare of the commoners, their protectors against the patricians, having the power of veto over senatorial legislation. They appear in this scene, however, as the aloof superiors of their charges, obviously contemptuous of their political frailty.

Since the Republican constitution conferred upon the tribunes personal inviolability ("congressional immunity") during their term of office, Caesar's "putting to silence" of Flavius and Marullus for "disrobing" his public images, reported by Casca in the second scene, appears as an arrogant defiance of Republican law.

I - 2 (Seduction)

This is the play's first great scene. Its structure, so characteristic of Shakespeare's dramatic architecture, is rhythmical (students gave some attention to the scenic rhythms of The Merchant of Venice). The ceremonial procession of Caesar and his entourage gives way quickly to its counter-movement, the conspiratorial dialogue of Cassius and Brutus, punctuated twice and at almost equal intervals by the offstage trumpet flourishes and shouts of the crowd; then the processional return of Caesar, followed again by a conspiratorial movement with a third malcontent, Casca, added to the first two, and the shift from the ceremonial verse to prose giving the effect of harmonic variation; all issuing finally in the cynical soliloquy of Cassius the chief plotter--

"And after this let Caesar seat him sure,
For we will shake him, or worse days enture"

--scene-end turning back upon the triumphal pomp of scene-beginning.

One of this play's main sources of interest is the complexity of three of its four chief actors, the problematic nature of their characterization. Antony is brilliantly conceived and carries with him his own compelling force on almost every appearance (this is not one of them); but his magnificence is uncomplex--this in itself undoubtedly one aspect of his driving force. Caesar, Cassius, and Brutus, on the other hand, are "problem" characters. They contain contradictions. They pose questions.

Is Shakespeare's Caesar really a Colossus, as Cassius calls him, or is his strength a sham, a ritualistic deception desperately maintained and the portrait itself a satirical thrust at the very concept of power? Is Brutus, then, moved only by "a general honest thought / And common good to all," in the language of Antony's generous eulogy at the end, or is he profoundly tainted by doctrinaire idealism and moral vanity, perhaps the subtlest of all known processes of corruption? And what, finally, of Cassius, the cankered vengeful man whose first important speech records his love for Brutus--is this to be taken simply as the unprincipled blandishment of the serpent? What in all these portraits is the appearance, what the reality?

It is notable that Caesar, to begin with the play's titular hero, appears as living man in only three of the play's eighteen scenes, and two of them are public, or official, appearances. In this drama Shakespeare was beginning to adapt the soliloquy to the purposes of the art of his great tragic period, but of the four major characters Caesar alone is not allowed the revelatory moment of soliloquy. It is the Caesar then of the marketplace and Senate that primarily we see and hear, it is against the evidence of his public role only that we must judge the truth or falsehood of the other characters' views of him. The restriction is a part of the play's calculated art.

And on Caesar's first appearance the restriction is severe indeed. His own speeches are few and remarkable for their curtness. The superstition implied in the command to Antony the festival athlete is taken directly from Plutarch and too much significance cannot be attached to it. His reference to himself in the third person is a clear enough indication of his imperial conception of himself; and we are given at the end in his contemptuous disposal of the soothsayer's warning a kind of retraction of the earlier implied superstition, with of course a hint of what the Greeks called hubris, an over-weening confidence in his own inviolability, his god-like indestructibility, which the gods were supposed to punish in the tragic catastrophe. This is all--from Caesar. Casca and Antony fawn their behavior here no doubt to be taken dramatically as evidence of Caesar's power to bind men to his will. On the stage we would have also the visible splendor of the procession and the massive effect of the "great crowd following." Emptied then, the stage belongs to Cassius and Brutus.

Now the dominant theme of the play's first phase begins to emerge, the seduction of Brutus (but we shall qualify this) by Cassius--the theme made explicit by Cassius himself in his soliloquy at scene-end ("For who so firm that cannot be seduced?"); it will be qualified because to state it so baldly oversimplifies Shakespeare's dramatic conception of this seduction and the moral and psychological complexity of the Brutus-Cassius relationship. Satan in the Garden is the archetypal Seducer; but Cassius clearly does not fit the stereotype of melodramatic satanism.

Although our tenth-graders probably cannot be taken on such a comparative excursion, our own view of the situation before us may be sharpened by a brief consideration of a more notorious seducer and his victim, Iago and Othello. In nobility Othello bears comparison with Brutus: each serves a powerful state, each has earned the trust of the ruling power, each has his own kind of heroic virtue; but their flaws make a bold contrast: Othello's is the flaw of passion, that of Brutus a flaw of mind. Each loves and is loved by _his_ victim (Desdemona, Caesar), and each must suppress that love in the interest, as each imagines, of a higher value; in the case of Othello, the interest of moral justice, in the case of Brutus, the interest of the state ("the general good" as he calls it). But the decision of Brutus is made after long private deliberation, which, Shakespeare is at pains to reveal to us, has begun before Cassius approaches him, and, once made ("It must be by his death"), it is nobly adhered to. Othello's decision, in contrast, is purely the decision of the passionate madness unleashed in him by Iago's false plotting, and, quickly made, it is _ignobly_ adhered to. Iago's "love" for Othello is a calculated pretense and a necessary condition of his success. Cassius' love for Brutus may at first seem like a similarly calculated campaign tactic; but Cassius is psychologically more complex than Iago, his love _is_ (to answer one of our earlier questions) surely genuine, and is made to develop a nobility of its own before the tragic story has run its course. The eulogy that follows the suicide of Othello is justly terse and is spoken by Cassio, the wronged man who truly loved him: "he was great of heart." The contrast with the great tribute paid to the suicide Brutus by his enemy in the field, Mark Antony, is obvious. Cassius is no Iago; and if Brutus is a victim he is the victim primarily of himself and the spirit of Caesar that "walks abroad and turns our swords / In our own proper entrails."[1]

This may help to put the Cassius-Brutus dialogue in perspective.

The "gamesome" lover of plays and music, Mark Antony, is used by Shakespeare in this scene as a touchstone for character contrasts with Brutus and Cassius; from what we learn a little later from Caesar,

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[1] Some equally tantalizing parallels and contrasts can be made with Macbeth and his Lady: the initial bond of love; Macbeth's clear predisposition for the deed; the political context (much more important than in _Othello_, much less important than in _Julius Caesar_). The concluding judgment in _Macbeth_ on "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen" shows how astounding in their boldness are Shakespeare's variations on his basic themes.

Cassius has no more interest in frivolous entertainment, here the "order of the course," than Brutus, and his opening question after the departure of Caesar and his train is designed by Shakespeare to bring out the most obvious trait of Brutus, the austere seriousness of his temper. His curt "I'll leave you" then leads naturally to Cassius' charge that Brutus' attitude toward him has changed "of late," that he bears "too stubborn and too strange a hand / Over the friend that loves you." That Brutus feels obliged to explain himself testifies to his recognition of the claim of friendship Cassius has upon him, while at the same time the explanation is made to introduce the theme of the conflict within Brutus that is to continue into the orchard scene (II, 1).

Conflict is essential to dramatic action. "External" conflict, conflict between characters of factions (Shylock vs Antonio and Portia, Montagues vs Capulets) is easiest to handle on the stage and takes its crudest form in duel or battle. "Internal" conflict holds stronger interest for the sophisticated, but is harder to handle dramatically. The novelist can do it by direct introspection. The soliloquy as Shakespeare handles it (Hamlet provides the most obvious examples) is the dramatic analogy of the novelist's subjective eavesdropping, but the playwright may also manage it through speeches delivered to an intimate friend. The latter device is used here, in Brutus' confession of the war within him of "passions of some difference," a revelation that of course encourages Cassius to continue. At the same time the confidence shows Brutus' trust in Cassius. Is it a mistaken trust, like that of young Juliet in the Nurse?

His challenge of friendship met, and met in terms he must have hoped for, Cassius now begins to appeal to Brutus' vanity; but it is a noble vanity, the vanity of the "honourable man," the Brutus-image that Antony is to play upon with such deadly irony in the funeral oration later. Brutus seems to sense the threat that Cassius' first speech on the theme contains:

> "Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
> That you would have me seek into myself
> For that which is not in me?"

In the light of his earlier admission of his inner warfare, this may seem disingenuous; but the honorable man's quick impulse to deny even to a friend the dangerous thing which he knows is indeed within him is psychologically sound, and the playwright's touch here tends to humanize the "noblest Roman of them all." Cassius, however, who knows his man (for doesn't "friendship"mean just such knowledge?), cannot resist an ironic thrust in the speech that follows: he, as Brutus' mirror,

> "Will modestly discover to yourself
> That of yourself which you yet know not of."

The lines are a challenge to the subtlety of the art of the actor whose good fortune is is to be assigned the role of Cassius.

The ironic self-indulgence is quickly followed by a compensatory appeal to Brutus confidence, in the reasons Cassius advances for his not being held dangerous (11. 76-83); but when Brutus next speaks it is not in reply to Cassius, but instead a bemused response, spoken almost involuntarily and as if he were alone, to the first offstage "flourish and shout":

> "What means this shouting? I do fear the people
> Choose Caesar for their king."

But Brutus of course has taken the sense of the cautious language that Cassius has been using, just as Cassius has understood the meaning of Brutus' inner conflict; and what a fine stroke of the playwright it was to give it to Brutus to make the first overt reference to Caesar and the political threat he seems to represent, and, within the world of the play, how grateful Cassius must feel for the lucky chance of that offstage shout. He pounces:

> "Ay, do you fear it?
> Then must I think you would not have it so."

The monosyllables, which in reading should be given almost equal weight, convey in their emphatic simplicity the intensity of Cassius' passion at this triumphant moment. The political aspect of the theme is out in the open at last.

The moral aspect of that issue, as well as the true nature of Brutus' inner conflict, is made explicit immediately in the following speech of Brutus (11. 88f.). It may be defined as a question: when if ever may a virtuous man be justified in betraying a personal loyalty for the sake of an impersonal loyalty to a state or an idea? Or it may be put in another way: does a noble end (in this case the preservation of the ancient Republic) ever justify the use of ignoble means (secret conspiracy to assassinate)? These are the "passions of some difference" which have made Brutus a man "with himself at war," forgetting "the shows of love to other men"; and without Brutus' capacity for love--love of Cassius, love of Caesar--there would be no tragedy.

The issue defined, words now begin to play their part in the seduction process--and indeed this play employs what may be called a semantics of fatality. In the rest of this dialogue words like "general good," "honour," "virtue," "free," "fate," "fault" are made to do their insidious work (all words corrupt; absolute words corrupt absolutely). Brutus' moral vanity leads him to the noble boast: he loves the name of honor more than he fears death. "Honour" then will be the "subject" of Cassius' story. But the subject leads directly to the attack on Caesar's infirmities, his failure as swimmer in the Tiber, his epileptic fit in Spain--should "a man of such feeble temper. . . bear the palm alone"?[2]

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[2] Contrast Plutarch: Caesar was "often subject to headache, and otherwise to the falling sickness. . ; but yet therefore yielded not to the disease of his body, to make it a cloak to cherish him withal, but, contrarily, took the pains of war as a medicine to cure his sick body, fighting always with his disease, traveling continually, living soberly,

Words then are made to serve the purpose, as it seems, of philosophical generalization:

"Men at some time are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

It is a famous passage, one of the many in Shakespeare that lend themselves to independent quotation, usually introduced by the tag, "as Shakespeare said," and offered as a "great truth" underwritten by genius. The trouble with this careless practice is that the "great truths" of Shakespeare often seem to destroy themselves in head-on collisions. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars. . ." Yes--but: "It is the stars, / The stars above us govern our condition," as Shakespeare also said. Well, Shakespeare of course did not say either. Cassius utters the first speech, Kent of *King Lear* the second, and if we must search for great truths in Shakespeare it is well to begin with this one: that what the plays most insistently "tell" us is that human experience in all its ambigous complexity is defiant of all attempts to explain it in epigrams, which when they appear are usually made to serve ironic rather than "philosophical" purposes. W. H. Auden puts it succinctly although perhaps somewhat extremely:

> We do not know what Shakespeare's personal beliefs were, nor his opinion on any subject (though most of us probably think we do). All we can notice is an ambivalence in his feelings towards his characters which is, perhaps, characteristic of all great dramatists. (from "The Globe," an essay in *The Dyer's Hand*, Random House)

In the scene now under consideration, the ambivalence (a "coexistence of opposite and conflicting opinions about the same person or object"--dictionary) might be described as follows. Cassius is what we have learned to call a political activist. His motives may be obscure--is it love of liberty or simply personal jealousy that really impels him? --but as we see him here he is undivided, he pursues his goal with a fierce single-mindedness that on the face of it is admirable; but his goal is the enlistment of Brutus in cause of assassination, which may be something a little less than admirable. In any case, what now he must fear and use all possible expedients to overcome is Brutus' apparent indecisiveness. By conteast with Cassius' single-mindedness, the war within Brutus of "passions of some difference," suggests weakness, inability to act in the cause of liberty; but of course the act contemplated is political murder, and so his hesitation is commendable. Nevertheless, the immediate goal of Cassius is to instill in Brutus the will to act; and to act in the way contemplated will have consequences that are irrevocable, it will be to take fate in one's hands. Our human pride makes us want to believe that this is possible; if we *are* governed by the stars, all individual effort is futile, and the stars are coldly indifferent to

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and commonly lying abroad in the field." Shakespeare's departure from his source in the writing of Cassius' speech clarifies his intention in the drawing of Cassius' character.

human desires. Brutus (Cassius knows his man) is of a philosophical temper, therefore Cassius will try "philosophical" persuasion--tempered of course with some "philosophical" caution: men are masters of their fate only "at some time." Brutus would immediately reject a more sweeping statement than this, and Cassius would then lose some of his trust. The word "fault" is then shrewdly selected to appeal to Brutus' moral sense, his virtue. If the "fault" is not in ourselves but in the stars, the very idea of moral choice is nonsense and morality is logically impossible. Thus does Cassius conduct his campaign of words, making his thrust into the torn mind of Brutus; thus the semantics of fatality.

What is at issue here is, first, the difference between "Philosophical statement" and "dramatic statement," and, second, the nature of Shakespearian tragedy itself.

On the first. The question to be asked about philosophical statement, of which these three lines given to Cassius may be taken out of context as characteristic, is, Is it *true,* and true for all men and in all times and places? Whereas the question to be asked about the speech viewed as dramatic statement is, Will it *work,* will it accomplish, first, the purpose Cassius intends, and, second, will it accomplish the purpose Shakespeare intends? Does Cassius himself "believe" that his philosophical statement is true? Assuming the question to be in some way appropriate, we can say only that we cannot know for sure, although it is an idea that would seem congenial to his activist temper. Whereas philosophical statement tends towards the abstract and the general, dramatic statement, by which we mean the whole statement made by scene and act and play, is concrete and particular. The characters may often indulge in generalization, but the generalization is always inescapably linked to specific motive and a given temperament and the while concrete action of the play.

Second, then. Central to Shakespeare's tragic vision is a simple principle: the tragic decision once it is made has consequences unforeseen by the maker of it and usually the very opposite of the consequences intended. This contradiction, or reversal, in the action of the play is called *tragic irony.* :"Men at some time are masters of their fate"; but at the end "fate" has proved the "master" of Brutus and Cassius. Shakespeare did not then believe in the philosophical statement he gave to Cassius to speak, and wrote the play to prove it false? The second question is at least irrelevant and at best superficial, and no confident answer can be supplied for the first. For instance, three times later in the drama Cassius and Brutus argue about alternative courses of action, three times Brutus overrides Cassius' judgment, and in each instance with disastrous results. The specific introduction of alternate courses that are clearly possible surely shows that no man's fate is irrevocably fixed in advance: the "stars" then must not be the determinants of man's fate; rather, man's judgments must be. The tragic fate, then, would seem simply to mean that man's power of judgment is nearly always fatally limited when it comes to the weighing of consequences that must precede judgment. Thus the tragic knowledge that Brutus is brought to in the last act of the play:

"O that a man might know
The end of this day's business ere it come!
But it sufficeth that the day will end
And then the end is known."

This at least is "true."

Cassius' long speech and the great scene continue. As if fatigued by the relentless prodding of Cassius, Brutus asks for respite, in the plea once more acknowledging the love between them. He will postpone judgment; they will talk further. Cassius is grateful that his "weak words"--his ironic sense is not unlike Iago's--have had some effect, and then "Caesar and his Train" are back again. We do not yet know what has happened offstage to arouse the anger that now shows itself in Caesar's countenance, but are promised an explanation from the eye-witness Casca--"after his sour fashion."

Caesar and Antony separate themselves from the others on the stage for a confidential dialogue about Cassius, which supplements the knowledge we have just gained from the preceding dialogue with a view of Cassius from within the play--indeed from Cassius' intended victim. Our superior knowledge takes note of Antony's failure to read the signs right ("Fear him not, Caesar; he's not dangerous"--it is a mistake Cassius will not make about Antony); it throws Caesar's acuteness into relief, and his comment on Cassius' habit of self-mockery and the dangerous jealousy of such men when "they behold a greater than themselves" is consistent with what we have just seen and heard of him. Then comes Caesar's significant statement: "I rather tell thee what is to be feared / Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar." "What is to be feared," that is, feared by the generality of men, is of course not feared by Caesar. His character is beginning to fill out a little. He must wear his public cloak of invincibility. It will prove his flaw.

We are left, then, with Brutus, Cassius, and Casca, whose "sour fashion" in this scene is expressed through the "natural" cadences of prose, set off against the pentameter lines which Shakespeare continues to give to Cassius and Brutus--a return to the mixture of styles used in the first scene. The verse-prose decision was governed, although not always strictly, by an aristocratic principle: the common people in the plays almost invariably use prose, the great personages verse. Casca of course is the peer of Brutus and Cassius, but the "rabblement" with their sweaty nightcaps" and "stinking breath" are so emphatically a part of the subject of his discourse that Shakespeare perhaps felt that the aristocratic passion of his contempt might be cast, with some ironic effect, in the democratic medium.

The eye-witness Casca's explanation of the flourishes and shouts that we and Brutus and Cassius have heard (there were only two of them, although Casca reports three-printer's lapse or Shakespeare's?) seems to provide the first objective evidence the play has furnished that the fears of Cassius and Brutus are justified: Caesar is dangerously ambitions, Antony is his willing tool, and therefore a desperate counter-measure may be necessary. There is of course a question about the dependability of Casca as a witness: the passion under which he seems to be laboring certainly raises the question of his objectivity. Furthermore, his most important "evidence" is a matter of interpretation, necessarily subjective: "to my thinking, he would fain have had it. . . he put it by again; but to my thinking, he was very loath to lay his fingers off it." But the phrase that Shakespeare has him repeat must be intended to mark Casca as a man who, in spite of his passion, will not claim more for the truth of his interpretation than he reasonably can; he shows some concern for accuracy in getting details right--it was not really a crown but "one of these coronets"; and his general bluntness of manner further disarms suspicion. We shall of course wait for other evidence, but Casca's function now at least seems clear: his report seems to support the view that the threat to the Republic is real.

The soliloquy of Cassius that concludes the scene is, however, in the light of all this, somewhat puzzling. If Caesar's treasonable ambition is now established, why should not the "honourable mettle" of "noble" Brutus lead him directly, without further pressure, to the decision to enter into the conspiracy? Two considerations are invited. The soliloquy shortly reintroduces the theme of Caesar's love for Brutus, whose "honorable mettle" may, then, still lead him to adhere to the personal rather than the political loyalty. Cassius then must continue to apply his pressure. Put the second consideration in the form of a question: does the play as a whole reflect a political view that would make the removal of a political leader, no matter how great the apparent justification, a crime against the social order the state should guarantee? If it does, then "honorable mettle" should lend itself to the support of authority and Brutus' participation in the conspiracy will be a deviation from political rectitude, and Cassius himself more seducer than patriot.

I-3 through II-1 ("O conspiracy")

The two great scenes of the First Phase are the one just studied and the scene in Brutus' orchard (II-1), in which the conspiratorial pact is concluded, Caesar's fate sealed. I-3 is a dramatic bridge connecting the two, but in crossing it we may pause in contemplation five times: a slow passage.

1. The cosmic portents. Casca: "Either there is a civil strife in heaven, / Or else the world, too saucy with the gods, / Incenses them to send destruction." Later:

> "When these prodigies
> Do so conjointly meet, let not men say
> 'These are their reasons--they are natural,'
> For I believe they are portentous things
> Unto the climate that they point upon."

Casca's panic (what has happened to the sour realist of the preceding scene?) would not have been viewed as comic superstition by the Elizabethan audience. The world was viewed as a vast hierarchy of being extending from the vegetable and animal worlds through the microcosm man and the social order in which he has his proper place up to the astronomical and spiritual heavens themselves. This vision is given apt expression in a famous long speech of Ulysses in Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida (I-3):

> "The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre [earth]
> Observe degree, priority, and place,
> Insisture [regularity], course, proportion, season, form,
> Office, and custom, all in line of order."

It is a vision of a cosmic order ideally ruled and guaranteed by an authority necessary to it. A threat to authority in any of the spheres of the cosmic order is an impious invitation to chaos in all its spheres. Again and again in the tragedies, the breakdown of order in state or family is anticipanted or accompanied by disorders in the natural world (cf. Macbeth, King Lear). Casca's rejection of a purely naturalistic ("scientific") explanation of the night's prodigies, which are a continuing accompaniment to this scene and the two following, is, in the context of the time as well as of the imaginative world of the play, both orthodox and significant. It provides another perspective on the assassination of Caesar and its consequences.

2. Cicero (11. 33-35):

> "Indeed it is a strange-disposed time.
> But men may construe things after their fashion,
> Clean from the purpose of the things themselves."

Literally this means only: they may be portents, but men may misinterpret them. But it has deeper thematic significance, directly related to the tragic conception we have briefly discussed: men must "construe things" in order to make decisions and to act, but they can do so only "after their fashion," and will almost certainly err. The speech has bearing upon the decision Brutus will shortly make. Its idea is reformulated by Messala in the last act of the play:

> "O hateful Error, Melancholy's child,
> Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
> The things that are not?"

(But is it not true that Caesar is ambitious?)

3. Cassius (11. 61f.):

> "You are dull, Casca, and those sparks of life
> That should be in a Roman you do want. . ."

Cassius has entered too late to hear Cicero's warning about the false construction men may put upon things, but we remember it as he construes the portents for Casca's benefit in this long speech. Cassius turns all things to his single-minded purpose. There is no division in him.

4. Casca (11. 89f.):

"Indeed, they say the senators tomorrow
Mean to establish Caesar as a king. . ."

Again Shakespeare gives it to Casca to provide support for the assumption of the threat. Yet--"they say." In the "Induction" to 2 Henry IV, written about two years before Julius Caesar, "Rumour, painted full of tongues," says:

"Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
The which in every language I pronounce,
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports."
"They say?"

5. Cassius and Casca never appear in a more unfavorable light than they do at the end of this bridge scene, when the seduction campaign is nearing its successful conclusion--

"Three parts of him
Is ours already, and the man entire
Upon the next encounter yields him ours."

It is the ruthlessness of Cassius' determination to use Brutus, to possess him wholly, to make of the living man a mere instrument, a tool, and this with no concern for the agony the issue has brought to Brutus ("Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar, / I have not slept," he will tell us shortly), that is so shocking in this man whom we have heard protesting his love for Brutus. And, as Casca's following speech makes clear, it is Brutus' virtue, or at least his reputation for it, that they propose to use. --Yet before the end of the play Shakespeare will redeem Cassius in our eyes. This is the Shakespearian ambivalence that Mr. Auden has remarked upon.

The playwright gives Brutus four soliloquies in the first eighty-five lines of the dimly-lit orchard scene: his private torture must now be shown directly.

One effect of the opening line of the first soliloquy--"It must be by his death"--and the movement of Brutus' private thoughts thereafter is to suggest that Cassius may have exaggerated the importance of the role he has been playing to win to his purpose "the man entire." Cassius has done his bit; but if Brutus has been "seduced" it may have been by something more subtle than the blandishments of Cassius.

The decision has been made; the first soliloquy then is a painful search for arguments to justify it, beginning as we might expect with the argument of the "general cause." In what follows, however, we must note the man's heavy reliance on the subjunctive mood of future possibility--as he must, since so far in spite of Casca so little really has been offered in the way of fact for the indicative mood to work on.

The key verbs are *might*, *may*, and *would*.

"He would be crowned.

How that *might* change his nature, there's the question."

Crown Caesar king,

"And then I grant we put a sting in him
That at his will he *may* do danger with."

An abstract idea presents itself--and the danger in abstractions is that they depersonalize all issues:

"Th'abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins
Remorse [mercy] from power."

But he returns, painfully, to the concrete truth--he has not known a time when Caesar's "affections," passions, swayed "more than his reason." It is the truth, then, about the real Caesar, the Caesar Brutus *knows*, which must now somehow be subverted, if Brutus is to kill him and yet keep intact the self-image of his own virtue. To do this, the real Caesar must be changed into something evil which "virtue" *must* destroy if it *be* virtue. So, an elevation of Caesar to the top of "ambition's ladder" may change Caesar's character. "Then lest he *may*, prevent." This is the only solution to Brutus' private problem, and the lines that follow show that he knows what he is doing--the editor's paraphrase is useful: "Since our case against [Caesar] will not be supported by his known nature, this is how our case should be made." So, Brutus makes it. Caesar's power augmented, he "*would* run to these and these extremities." Helped, then, by the image of the serpent's egg ("Think of him" as that), "which, hatched, *would* as his kind grow mischievous," Brutus is now able to confirm himself in his decision: "kill him in the shell." The brutality of the language is justified by the device of the serpent simile, which has so conveniently presented itself in this dark orchard.

The speech is worth close attention not only because it is in its very transparency a classic example of what we have learned to call "rationalization," a use of reason to placate conscience; but, more importantly, because it illuminates the nature of what may be called the "tragedy of virtue." An accumulation irony is developed in this drama by the steady recurrence of and play upon the word *honor* in it. Brutus loves "the name of honor" more than he fears death, Cassius knows "that virtue" to be in him, and so makes honor the subject of his story --in his own curious way. If Brutus lacked honor, he would be of little value to the conspirators, who frankly need his reputation for honor to grace their desperate cause; but also, if Brutus lacked honor, that is, lacked an idealistic devotion to the Republican cause, he would not be susceptible to the conspirators' appeals. His honor, then, like the innocence of Othello--tragic paradox--is his flaw, and from the flaw issues the destruction of the state his honor has tried to serve, and the self-destruction which is the final despairing gesture of his honor.

But the "honor"--clearly the word needs quotation marks--which is Brutus' devotion to the Republic is at odds with the "honor," or virtue, which is the love of truth (the Caesar he actually knows) and personal integrity. This is the tragic division within him which he must try to resolve, simply because he is an honorable man. He does it speciously in this soliloquy; but, although it makes it possible for him to act, the resolution is false and the division within results in violent division in the state. At the end, it appears that the division within can be resolved only in his death. Thus the "tragedy of virtue."

11. 44-5:

"The exhalations, whizzing in the air,
Give so much light that I may read by them."

Casca's portents, which should be heeded as warnings of disaster, serve Brutus now only as lamps by means of which he is able to read the anonymous command to awake and "see" himself--to see, that is, his "honorable" mission to "speak, strike, redress." It seems fairly clear that Shakespeare was not a man to miss any opportunity for irony. This one must have been something of a risk on sunny afternoons in the Globe.

11. 63f.:

"Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, etc. . ."

The nightmare vision with which this third soliloquy begins shows that the inner division has not been resolved.

"The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council, and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection."

Shakespeare here has Brutus make explicit the analogy (with perhaps a causal connection implied) between the insurrection within and the insurrection without which is to come. The comparison seems to occur naturally to Brutus, but he is blind to its prophetic value.

11 81f.:

"O conspiracy,
Sham'st thou to show thy dang'rous brow by night,
When evils are most free?"

One commentator has summarized Brutus' plight as a tragic discrepancy between the man and his deed. Everything about the act of conspiracy is repugnant to his personal virtue. Conspiracy must go masked, must hide its "monstrous visage" in "smiles and affability" (cf. Hamlet on Claudius: "meet it is I set it down / That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain"). This is truly dishonor, and this last soliloquy is bitter with self-loathing. But he is caught: "honor" triumphs over honor.

l. 119 (and passim to scene-end):

"Give me your hands all over, one by one."

As if bolstered by the physical presence of the conspirators, and brought into their brotherhood as it were by the ceremonious second clasping of hands, Brutus is now resolute, decisive, and eloquently authoritative, as if conscious that his honor qualifies him above the others for leadership.

The most important speech in the rest of the scene is the long eloquent reply Brutus makes to Cassius' proposal that Antony must fall with Caesar. It is the first of the three occasions in the play when Brutus decisively turns aside his friend's advice, each time to be proved wrong by the outcome. The differences of judgment emphasize the differences between the two men and the difference in their qalifications for the roles they have chosen to play. Cassius is a political realist, a thorough-going pragmatist whose decisions are based exclusively on his estimate of probable consequences. His cynicism itself serves in such a cause to make his judgment of men more pragmatically dependable than the judgments of Brutus, whose idealism is a fatal handicap in such a situation. Antony proves to be a "shrewd contriver" indeed, as Cassius says. The moral contempt that the virtuous Brutus feels for Antony's "sports," "wildness," and sociability (Brutus seems most himself when he is alone) blinds him to Antony's other talents. Cassius alone might have been a match for Antony, a fellow realist; Brutus, whom Cassius has worked so hard to enlist in this cause, is a fatal handicap.[3]

There is more, however, to Brutus' refusal to destroy Antony than a simple failure to understant him: it is forced upon him by, again, the way in which he must view the assassination if he is to participate in it and still maintain in himself the image of his own superior virtue. To kill Antony would "seem too bloody"--Brutus would have them not "butchers" but "sacrificers." For a moment it seems as if he has even found a way of denying that blood--his friend's blood--will flow at all: it is the spirit of Caesar they must put down, "And in the spirit of men there is no blood"; but then--" alas, Caesar must bleed for it." But he will be killed "boldly, but not wrathfully," carved "as a dish fit for the gods," so that, when it is done, the conspirators will be called "purgers, not murderers." The speech is another great example of language eloquently put to the use of the needs of the instinct of evasion, all the more astounding and all the more terrifying for its probably sincerity at the moment. Poor Cassius, who has worked so hard to put himself in the power of this virtuous man (it helps us to imagine how Clemenceau must have felt in the presence of Woodrow Wilson). Lucky Antony.

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[3] Plutarch makes no bones about his absolute agreement with Cassius: "For the first fault that [Brutus] did was when he would not consent to his fellow conspirators that Antonius should be slain; and therefore he was justly accused that thereby he had saved and strengthened a strong and grievous enemy of their conspiracy. The second fault was when he agreed that Caesar's funerals should be as Antonius would have them; the which indeed marred all." "The Life of Marcus Brutus."

So the scene moves relentlessly to its end. There is Brutus' parting command to his forces--they are now his forces--to "look fresh and merrily," as good conspirators should. That is followed by the exchange between Brutus and Portia, before whom also he has had to wear a mask, although before they part he promises to take her into his confidence. Then the visit of the sick man Caius Ligarius, and the concluding dialogue of the scene in which the words sick and sickness (they have appeared first in the earlier references to Caesar's "falling sickness") echo and re-echo with premonitions of doom.

The play's First Phase is finished and the tragic course irrevocably charted.

FIRST PHASE: SUMMARY

At the risk of implying a disproportionate emphasis, we have dwelt at length upon the drama's First Phase because a thorough understanding of it is essential to a successful reading of the play as a whole. What have we discovered?

1. The problematic nature of the characterization.. Brutus is a puzzle to himself, and nearly all of the chief characters except perhaps Antony are problems to us, readers or audience. Study of the play will necessarily be speculative. What is the appearance, what the reality? There are no easy answers. As in life itself?

2. Division can be thought of as the play's central theme. Division within reflects and issues in division without, division in the state. One aspect of the division is the conflict between personal virtue and civic, or political, virtue. Are they always at odds? Necessarily at odds?

3. Since the ostensible subject of the drama is political, it seems appropriate that the play's style is dominated by the rhetoric of persuasion, the art of oratory. Note how the audience of the "persuaders" is gradually extended: first, Cassius to Brutus alone; then, in the orchard scene, Brutus to the seven or eight conspirators; finally, in the Forum, market-place, Brutus and then Antony to the populace, in the drama's oratorical

climax. In the political situation, words become weapons as deadly as the daggers that flash in the assassination scene. Semantics of fatality.

4. The difference between philosophical and dramatic statement, essential to dramatic understanding. "What Shakespeare said" is nothing less than the play in its entirety. In study, in interpretation, students should learn to be content with ambiguity. As we must in life?

5. Tragedy: the tragic decision has consequences the opposite of those intended. (The emphasis is on tragic, which refers to a literary mode. In life, the consequences of decisions often at least approximate their intentions. But approximate only. Growing up is learning to live with approximations.) The hero's "flaw" is often simply an aspect of his "virtue". George Meredith: "We are betrayed by what is false within." Could rewrite: We are betrayed by what is "true" within. Tragedy of virtue.

6. The ideal order, in society, in cosmos: its relation to authority.

7. Self-deception. Rhetoric of persuasion often rhetoric of self-persuasion. The killing of Caesar will somehow not really be the killing of Caesar. Query: when is a murder not a murder?

Everything that happens in the Second and Third Phases issues from the circumstances developed in the First Phase. In spite of their great importance (and the Second Phase especially is dramatically the most compelling of the three), we may nevertheless be justified in treating the last two phases somewhat more summarily that we have the first.

SECOND PHASE: ASSASSINATION AND THE TRIUMPH OF ANTONY

II-2 ("Your wisdom is consumed with confidence")

"Thunder and lightning. Enter Julius Caesar in his nightgown". The portents continue through three successive scenes with great theatrical effect. The storm as it continues comes to be felt not so much as an "omen" as a theatrical symbol of the storms within men themselves, issuing in the "storm" of state.

On this, Caesar's third appearance on stage, the dominatnt trait is his character seems to be his imperiousness of manner, what Calpurnia calls his "confidence," that we noted in the first Act. In view of what we know is shortly to happen to him, the sentence, "Danger knows full well / That Caesar is more dangerous than he" (ll. 46-7), must strike us as a foolish boast, a failure of wisdom: "Danger" knows no such thing. This is the "flaw" that fixes Caesar's fate. Furthermore, the sentence comes as part of Caesar's rejection of the priests' augury which he himself has ordered, following hard upon his refusal to give serious attention to the night's portents. Cassius has reported in the preceding scene that Caesar

"is superstitious grown of late,
Quite from the main opinion he held once
Of Fantasy, of dreams, and ceremonies" (11. 208-10).

The report is belied by what we see here. The modern rationalist will of course approve his "common sense"; but in the world of the play his refusal to heed the portents is foolhardiness. Yet our view of him is--again-necessarily ambivalent: his fatalistic acceptance of the obscure "end. . . purposed by the mighty gods" and of death that is certain for all men, that will come when it will come," has its own melancholy impressiveness.

His sudden about-face under the pressure of Calpurnia's kneeling plea has been taken by some readers to mean that his earlier self-sufficiency has been a show only. Others may find such an interpretation over-subtle. Such ambiguities abound. Decius Brutus' favorable ingerpretation of Calpurnia's dream of the bleeding statue is another reminder of Cicero's

"men may construe things after their fashion,
Clean from the purpose of the things themselves,"

although the "fashion" in this instance is part of the plot. Decius Brutus also here repeats to Caesar himself the rumor earlier reported by Casca:

"The Senate has concluded
To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar."

Is it intended as a final corroboration of the threat to the Republic, or is it offered by this conspirator as bait only? All we know is that it works: Caesar does go to the Senate House. If Caesar had lived to receive such an offer would he have again refused it as he did three times in Act I? We cannot know. The point is, neither, in truth, could Brutus and the other conspirators know.

The arrival of the conspiratorial escort, Caesar's friendly greetings to them, and the concluding aside of Brutus need no comment.

III-1 ("Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!")

Artemidorus prepares his warning, suspecting however that the Fates may conspire with traitors (II-3); we are given a view of the anguish of Portia (II-4), the anguish that proves that Cato's daughter is more "womanly" that she had thought, and that will issue in her suicide. The warnings of both soothsayer and Artemidorus fail (III-1), and the rulers of Republican Rome enter the Senate House for the scene of "sacrifice."

Caesar's contemptuous refusal of the petition of Metellus Cimber ("I spurn thee like a cur out of my way"--Antonio has used similar language with Shylock) seems designed to persuade us that Caesar has already succombed to "th'abuse of greatness" that Brutus in his first soliloquy in the orchard subjunctively prophesied. There is perhaps a double significance in Caesar's last long speech ("But I am constant as the Northern Star") before his death. That it was written with ironic intention is obvious--the swords swiftly prove that no man "unassailable holds on his rank." But the astronomical imagery of the first half of the speech followed by the social analogy ("So in the world") is also a clear statement of the hierarchical Elizabethan world view, and Caesar's authoritarian arrogance need not be taken as a satirical attack upon authority. The irony of the speech is its dominant effect, however, set off as it is against Cinna's "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!" immediately after the killing.

The cry is repeated twice, first by Cassius, then by Brutus, in the speech in which he first rationalizes the murder as an act of "friendship" ("we. . . have abridged / His time of fearing death"), then demands the ceremonial marking with the warm blood of Caesar: and

"Then walk forth, even to the market place,
And waving our red weapons o'er our heads,
Let's all cry 'Peace, freedom, and liberty'."

Peace, freedom, liberty--and blood. At this moment at least Shakespeare's attitude toward Brutus would seem unambivalent.

The point at which Antony enters the Senate House in this scene can be thought of as the play's structural fulcrum. His courage in coming there after his first moment of panic ("Fled to his house amazed") and the dignified authority with which he handles himself as he enters among Caesar's enemies are clearly premonitory of the reversal which the rest of the play will bring about.

After Brutus has assured him of his safety and he has been promised a voice in the new dispensation, his behavior is breathtaking in its audacity. First there is the ritualistic handshaking, but proposed with a cool reminder that it is killers' hands he is about to clasp--"Let each man render me his bloody hand." The ceremony itself is in ironic parallel with the similar ceremony of the conspiratorial brotherhood in Brutus' orchard. Then follows swiftly Antony's open apology to the spirit of Caesar (as it turns out, it has not been killed) for his apparent betrayal, and the description of the assassination in terms of the deer-hunt, an unconscious (on Antony's part, not Shakespeare's) thrust at Brutus' sacrificial piety earlier. Antony then gets to the heart of the matter, and the moral center of the play thus far, in hoping

"that you shall give me reasons
Why and wherein Caesar was dangerous."

Brutus' quick "Or else this were a savage spectacle" shows how sensitive he is to this issue, but he now seems confident of his position:

> "Our reasons are so full of good regard
> That were you, Antony, the son of Caesar,
> You should be satisfied."

Then comes Antony's request to speak in the funeral ceremony, and for the second time the realist Cassius objects and is over-ruled by Brutus, moved this time by his confidence in his own power in the pulpit to "show the reason of our Caesar's death" and by his innocent belief that Antony himself will cooperate: "You shall not in your funeral speech blame us."

Antony's soliloquy (11. 254-75) accomplishes two things. His "these butchers" is a blunt expression of his soldier's contempt for whatever "reasons" Brutus may supply for the killing. It anticipates the violent indictment hurled in the faces of Brutus and Cassius in the parley in the field in the last act:

> "--your vile daggers
> Hacked one another in the sides of Caesar.
> You showed your teeth like apes, and fawned like hounds,
> And bowed like bondmen, kissing Caesar's feet;
> Whilst damned Casca, like a cur, behind
> Stuck Caesar in the neck."

Hacked! Apes, hounds, cur! Cassius under the impact of the charge can speak only to remind Brutus that if his counsel has ruled Antony would not have lived thus to revile them. Brutus is silent.

Most of the soliloquy however is devoted to prophesying the curse of civil discord that will be the real fruit of the assassination, in the course of it announcing the new theme of revenge that gives direction to roughly the second half of the play, but most clearly in the Third Phase.

> "And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
> Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war,
> That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
> With carrion men groaning for burial."

Octavius approaches Rome. The counter-revolution will soon be in the making.

III-2 ("Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!")

The duel in the field with swords is preceded by the oratorical duel, the duel with words in the market-place.

Brutus. The situation would seem to demand the formality of verse for both orations, but Shakespeare surprisingly chose to cast Brutus' speech in prose. It should be noted, however, that it is a prose which, in its calculated rhetorical devices of balance, antithesis, and parallelism and its studied organization, is as far removed from the conversational spontaneity of Casca's speeches in I-2 as any verse could possibly be.

> Casca: "I can as well be hanged as tell the manner of it. It was mere foolery; I did not mark it. I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown--yet 'twas not a crown neither, 'twas one of these coronets --and, as I told you, he put it by once; but for all that, to my thinking, he would fain have had it. Then he offered it to him again; then he put it by again; but to my thinking, he was very loath to lay his fingers off it. . ."
>
> Brutus: "Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all freemen? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honor him; but--as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honor for his valor; and death for his ambition."

Yet the latter is "prose" and is by contrast with Antony's verse "unpoetic" in that it is abstract in language (the bloodless nouns, words that Brutus finds so congenial--cause, honor, wisdom, love, fortune, valor, ambition) and in organization follows at least a surface logic. The prose suggests that he wishes to appeal only to the reason of his auditors, reflecting his idealistic faith in the power of reason to sway men to the truth--his truth. Yet is it really an appeal to reason? The speech is by no means politically naive. It is a demagogic appeal, formulated with a shrewdness that seems almost cynical: appeal to patriotism ("Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more"); appeal to the love of liberty (would his audience rather "die all slaves" than "to live all freemen?"); Caesar was slain for his ambition ("Who is here so base that would be a bondman?"); finally, the assertion of selflessness ("I have the same dagger for myself") in his devotion to his country ("--when it shall please my country to need my death"). The noble periods disguise a most skillful exploitation of the stock attitudes and unexamined prejudices of his audience, unflatteringly exposed to us in the play's first scene. Even the opening gambit--"hear me for my cause," but "believe me for my honor"--which has the old ring of Brutus' moral vanity, is political exploitation: a pragmatic exploitation not of his honor but of his reputation for it, and in a market place. Did Cassius write the speech for him?

In any case, and for the time being, it works (Shakespeare wrote it for him). Shakespeare's plebeians react as Shakespeare's plebeians must react (they have no choice, poor creatures). "Give him a statue with his ancestors." "Let him be Caesar" (!). "Caesar's better parts / Shall be crowned in Brutus."

But Brutus is competing with a very great actor.

Antony. "Enter Mark Antony [and others], with Caesar's body." The hacked corpse of the dictator, wrapped now in its bloody toga, is perhaps the most brilliantly employed stage prop in theatrical history. Brutus generously provided it ("Mark Antony, here, take you Caesar's body"). He might as well have given Antony the daggers also, while he was at it.

"For Brutus is an honorable man." Antony's strategy is to subject Brutus' honor to a relentless process of erosion by irony.

We have seen how Brutus himself has recognized that his "honor" can survive the assassination only if Caesar's ambition can be incontrovertibly established. This is his "reason" and his only one. The second issue is the conflict between loyalty to the person of Caesar and loyalty to the Republic. Honor, love, and ambition are the central points of his own speech. 1. "Believe me for mine honor." 2. To any dear friend of Caesar's "I say that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his." But, 3. "As Caesar loved me, I weep for him. . . as he was ambitious, I slew him." Of the ambition, Brutus, at this most crucial point, offers no proof. Antony goes to work on all these points.

He confronts the question of Caesar's ambition first (ll. 92-108), in a passage in which three times with only the most minor variations he uses the lines, "But Brutus says he was ambitious, / And Brutus is an honorable man." The lines cut back savagely upon the central weakness of Brutus' speech, which in effect says: I say Caesar was ambitious, and you must believe me because of my honor. Antony offers three facts as "proof" that Caesar was not ambitious; Caesar turned back his spoils of war into "the general coffers"; he often wept at the suffering of the poor; and three times he refused the crown "on the Lupercal". Really proof that Brutus is wrong? Not necessarily; but neither can Brutus "prove" that he is right. Antony has the easier job and his method is "objective". Note the conclusion of this part of the argument:

"I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know."

A great trial lawyer.

His strategy then calls for a display of feeling, a moment of personal grief, which by inference makes a telling contrast with Brutus' coldness.

"Bear with me,
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back with me."

It works.

"2. Pleb. Poor soul! his eyes are red as fire with weeping.
3. Pleb. There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony."

Great actor? Yes, although not necessarily insincere. In any case, "nobility" has now begun to transfer itself from Brutus to Antony.

He then introduces the weapon of Caesar's will--an appeal to the materialism of the populace; but of course he does not "mean" to read it, for he is not disposed to stir their "hearts and minds to mutiny and rage" against such honorable men as Brutus and Cassius. So he plays with them, to be rewarded at last by the words traitors, villains, murderers from the plebians. Topsy-turvydom.

The reading of the will is postponed until Antony has disposed of Brutus' "love" in the long emotionally-weighted speech that begins, "If you have tears, prepare to shed them now." He turns to his prop, identifies, as he could not possibly in fact do, the cuts in the toga made by Cassius and Brutus, whose thrust "was the most unkindest cut of all," so that "Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms, / Quite vanquished Caesar." The "kind souls," his auditors, weep, the toga is stripped from the corpse, "marred as you see with traitors." The work is done. "Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!" Antony, "no orator, as Brutus is," but "a plain blunt man," having seized upon for attack the very issues which so tortured Brutus during the play's First Phase, has made himself the agent of the curse he prophesied at the end of the preceding scene. "Domestic fury" is unleashed, the mob has even forgotten the will. "Go fetch fire!" "Pluck down benches!" And Antony: "Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot, / Take thou what course thou wilt."

Lepidus and Octavius have arrived and "Brutus and Cassius / Are rid like madmen through the gates of Rome." ("Belike," Antony comments drily, "they had some notice of the people / How I had moved them.") The Second Phase comes to an end with the lynching of Cinna the poet ("Tear him for his bad verses"--a brief wry excursion into literary criticism)--he is not Cinna the conspirator, but "no matter; his name's Cinna." This second of the two onstage murders is in truth a "savage spectacle." Brutus' reputation for honor lies in ruins.

SECOND PHASE: SUMMARY

Brutus is defeated in the verbal duel with Antony not simply because he is matched against a more skillful oratorical strategist; for all of Antony's strategy consists of seizing upon and exposing the weaknesses of Brutus' own position as we ourselves have become aware of them in the play's First Phase. The chief responsibility for the Fall of Brutus rests with Brutus himself. This has been an important aspect of the concept of the tragic hero since Aristotle.

The play's fulcrum. At the end of the Second Phase, however, Brutus' tragedy has not yet run its full course. Consequences of his decision and the assassination continue to unfold, and his own "tragic education" will not be completed until the last act. Only then will it be clear that the turning point was passed in the third act.

Caesar's Revenge: an appropriate title for the Third Phase. In the first two phases Caesar has seemed subordinate to Brutus in emphasis and interest, but he also is conceived in tragic terms: in the classical sense, in that he seems to be given some responsibility for his destruction; and in the medieval sense--the fall of a great man from prosperity. But his "spirit" has not been killed; Brutus has not succeeded in what he took his aim to be. It lives to become Caesar's avenger.

THIRD PHASE: THE REVENGE OF CAESAR

In the Third Phase the theme of division is continued and intensified: the division of civil war, and the division within the opposed forces: the quarreling of the triumvirate, the more bitter dissension between Brutus and Cassius.

IV-3 ("There is a tide in the affairs of men. . .")

The bickering of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus in IV-1 seems important only as anticipating the later war between Octavius and Antony, knowledge of which most of Shakespeare's audiences carried into the theater with them and the subject of course of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. The quarrel between Cassius and Brutus in IV-3 (it is continuous with IV-2) is of much greater interest.

We have not seen Brutus since he left the pulpit in the Forum, and he was not present to witness the destruction of his reputation by Antony. In this scene he is shown struggling still to maintain his own conception of the fatal act: "Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?" The passion aroused in him by Cassius' willing ness to condone Pella's "taking bribes" has its source in the fearful reality: the "sacrifice" has issued not in liberty but in corruption. Even Cassius, the foremost of his fellow conspirators in Brutus' heart, has been accused of having "an itching palm." His sense of outrage is understandable, although lesser mortals may feel more comfortable with Cassius' pragmatic acceptance of human frailty than with Brutus' self-righteousness ("For I am armed so strong in honesty"). We may sympathize with Cassius' shock--Brutus' language is intolerable ("Away, slight man!) --and now begin to feel him closer to our common hunanity that Brutus:

> "Brutus hath rived my heart.
> A friend should bear his friend's infirmities,
> But Brutus makes mine greater than they are."

The first words we heard Cassius utter in Act I brought the charge of a failure in love against Brutus. Then we could not be sure of his sincerity. Here our doubts begin to disappear: the Cassius of Caesar's "lean and hungry look" needs Brutus' love, needs the purely personal loyalty that Brutus with rationalistic facility denied in the case of Caesar. And, significantly, it is when Cassius offers Brutus his dagger and makes the connection explicit that Brutus recovers himself and the rift begins to heal:

> "Strike as thou didst at Caesar; for I know
> When thou didst hate him worst, thou lovedst him better
> Than ever thou lovedst Cassius."

The quarrel ends. Its effect has been to redeem Cassius in our eyes for his vulgar, even pathetic, humanity. By contrast, the stoical calm with which Brutus reports the suicide of Portia seems superhuman, even repellant, and Cassius perhaps feels it: "I have as much of this in art as you, / But yet my nature could not bear it so." And Brutus: "Well, to our work alive."

The quarrel scene in no way advances the main action of the drama. Its function is rather to give us deeper insight into the characters off the two men. It rehabilitates the character of Cassius, so that we may feel a human grief at his end when it comes; whereas it may a little widen the distance between us and Brutus, so that at his end what we may feel most strongly is the irony of his heroic fate, a purely intellectual awareness.

The main action is now resumed and moves to its end in a continuous sweep that is as indifferent to scene breaks as it is regardless of time and geography (the scene of both of the final acts in Asia Minor).

For the third time in the play Brutus vetoes the counsel of Cassius --their armies will take the initiative, march on Philippi. Brutus' argument is in part, and characteristically, philosophical:

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

The tide image stands for the forces in history that seem impersonal. All depends upon detecting the direction of their movement. Are they at flow or at ebb? The individual will must try to act in concurrence with, not in opposition to, the tide's motion. But "tide" is only a metaphor; tides can be measured, the movements of history cannot be. All depends really upon the construction men put upon things, and seldom can they be construed correctly. We are back at the center of the tragic idea. What really governs fate? The Ghost of Caesar? It too is a kind of metaphor, a metaphor for the mystery at the heart of things, appearing only to promise, enigmatically, another appearance at Philippi.

V ("--and then the end is known")

Under the pressure of events and the knowledge they bring with them, Cassius undergoes change: his old activist's confidence in the power of the individual will ("the fault, dear Brutus. . .) now has begun to give way to an awareness of the possible truth of "things that do presage"; but still he will "meet all perils very constantly." He and Brutus, so closely linked throughout the drama, take formal leave of each other knowing that the course of the day's business is out of their hands.

"But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known."

The keynote of the fighting itself is confusion, quite different from the orderly movement of tides, which man *can* measure. Cassius' suicide is caused by false report, "hateful Error, Melancholy's child," but his last words suggest that what seems error is really serving the "justice" of Caesar's revenge. That too may be only illusion. Titinius dies beside Cassius with the tragic cry, "Alas, thou hast misconstrued everything," and the sword by which he dies has killed first Caesar and then Cassius. And as Brutus nears his end the only comfort he can find is that men have been true to him. True. "Caesar, now be still."

But Brutus, whose honor Shakespeare at times as well as Antony has subjected to a process of ironic erosion, is at the end given the generous soldier's tribute.

"This was the noblest Roman of them all.
All the conspirators, save only he
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
He, only in a general honest thought
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'This was a man'."
"O, what a fall was there, my countrymen."

SUMMARY

(The Play and the Classroom)

"Tentative Thinking"

The main emphasis of the foregoing examination of *Julius Caesar* has been on the play's *ambiguity* and the corresponding *ambivalence* of our attitudes toward the chief characters: we at once admire Brutus for his idealistic selflessness of purpose and deplore the faults of judgment that seem inseparable from it; we deplore Cassius' exploitation of Brutus' honor and yet feel our human bond with him in his need for

Brutus' love. Such contradictions are central to the play's meaning. Students should be led to discover them for themselves. At first many of them undoubtedly will view the various characters with unqualified admiration or unqualified condemnation. They will--and should be encouraged to do so at first--argue sharply opposed black-and-white views. They will feel that all questions should have clear-cut "right" answers. As they move through the play, however, they can be led to see that some of the most important human and literary questions can have only speculative answers. They should come to understand the validity of the tentative. The natural tendency of the mind toward a unitary narrowness may be overcome. It is in this way that education in tragedy liberalizes and matures.

Scott Fitzgerald: "--the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function" ("The Crack-up").

"Tragedy"

A literary education requires some understanding of modes or genres. Some genres can be defined in terms of form or structure--for instance, "Petrarchan sonnet": so many lines with a fixed pattern of rhyme. Others are characterized in large part in terms of subject and the way in which it is treated. They cause more difficulty. Tragedy and comedy are modes of this kind. Students encountered the problem in the ninth grade when they were confronted by The Merchant of Venice --in what sense is that narrative of love and hate in bitter conflict a comedy? Some of them may have learned then that there must be an element of the tentative in arriving at definitions.

In the classroom, it will be useful to emphasize at the start that "tragedy" now has a popular usage, as in for instance some news reporting: "Two families were wiped out in an automobile collision early Friday morning. The tragedy occurred on Highway 99E ten miles south of Portland." In this context the word disaster would be preferable. A tragedy is a literary work, usually in dramatic form, with certain characteristics.

The foregoing study has identified most of them. Catastrophe is of course essential to the tragic mode. Unlike many tragedies, this play has two: one in Act III, one in Act V, where the single catastrophe usually occurs.

The tragic victims in the play are in one way or another responsible for what happens to them, and we feel that this is true in all of the most satisfactory tragedies. There is a kind of justice in the tragic fall. "Tragic justice," however, is different from "poetic justice." In the latter (which misuses the word "poetic"), virtue is rewarded and vice punished and that is all there is to it. In tragedy this is impossible because tragic characters are not simply either good or bad. They are good-and-bad--the usual human mixture. So we are moved to pity by their fall because of their "goodness" but recognize a kind of justice in their fall because of the flaws in that goodness. Thus ambiguity (good-and-bad) is essential to the tragic conception, and ambivalence is a feature of our "tragic response."

Another aspect of the tragic contradiction is irony of plot, which is closely linked with the idea of the hero's responsibility, the decisions he makes. He decides to commit an act in order to bring about a certain end, but the result of the act is the opposite of the end intended. This is sometimes called reversal (Aristotle's peripeteia).

The hero's awareness, as he nears his end, of what has happened to him, sometimes including an agonized recognition of his own responsibility for it, can be thought of as tragic knowledge or the tragic education.

Before the nineteenth century tragedies were written only about "great personages." With the rise of social and political democracy, the common man was granted the privilege of tragic suffering. In Shakespeare's time he could be given only comic or satirical treatment. Shakespeare's treatment of the plebeians reflects both a political attitude of his time and a literary convention.

Students can perhaps be led toward their definition of tragedy "inductively."

"Fate"

"The stars" in Shakespeare is a metaphor for "fate," meaning some impersonal force beyond human control that always determines human destiny. Its ends are mysterious, but it sometimes provides omens which might reveal the future if they could be correctly read. Usually they are misread or are simply not heeded.

There is so much dramatic emphasis upon decision-making in the face of alternate courses of action, and the decisions lead so plainly to the catastrophes, that not fate but the human will seems to be the determinant of the tragic destinies in *Julius Caesar*. Yet Cassius at the end does change his mind about the "things that do presage." How did Shakespeare want us to take it? We cannot be sure.

"Political Meaning"

In the English history plays Shakespeare's political position seems unambiguous. He is a divine-right manarchist, and the deposition even of an unworthy king like Richard II by a strong and able leader like Bolingbroke is shown to have the evil consequences of anarchy and civil war that result in our play from the assassination of Caesar, which can hardly be felt as otherwise than politically evil. In the Roman plays, however, the primary emphasis is moral and psychological rather than political; but discussion of the political issue should by no means be discouraged.

"Critical Standards"

"What are the identifying marks of greatness" in literature. "Who decides?"

Students should be expected to find reasons for their judgments (which they will all make in one way or another) within the literary work itself. Our discussion of the play may suggest ways of finding such reasons. To wit.

The internal coherence of the work as a whole. Its end is contained in its beginning. Parallel actions act as "binders": the killing of Caesar for a purpose, the senseless killing of Cinna the poet; the ritualistic handclasps in the orchard, the ritualistic (bloody) handshaking by Antony in the Senate House. Ironic contrast.

The imaginative brilliance in the building of particular scenes: the "seduction" scene with its two significant processional elements, the bold theatrical effects of the assassination scene and of the oratorical duel in the market place.

The subtle complexity of the characterization.

The way in which the whole dramatic conception challenges the mind: something that may as well be called intellectual power.

The play's functional employment of language. Diction, habits of speech, designed to reveal character. The persistent use of argumentation.

Caesar and The Merchant

Which is the better play? This question and the related ones asked in the Introduction to this document deserve some class consideration, if for no other reason than to give students some experience with the difficulties encountered in practical criticism. "Critical standards" cannot be applied to our "cases" as rigorously--even though we have our rules of evidence--as a civil code in a court of law. Our "verdicts" generally must be--again--tentative.

Some comparisons and contrasts can, however, be illuminating.

The theme of division is compellingly present (conflict is essential to dramatic action) in all of the plays--tragedies, comedies, histories; and in many of the comedies the divisions that threaten might quite convincingly have issued in catastrophe. Only the "comic" principle turns aside the threat. So it is with the threat to the "comic" harmony contained in the conception of the revenger Shylock. The tragic and the comic visions contemplate the same human impulses, and, complementing each other, give us a total view of the light and dark aspects of existence. Ambivalence of attitude toward character is also felt in the "comedy," in which Shylock, like Cassius, inspires in us both sympathy and outrage.

The differences are obvious, but here, in concluding, the stylistic contrast may be given some emphasis. One would not of course expect the political subject to generate the kind of lyricism encountered in the last act of The Merchant; but there are other kinds of poetry and the great tragedies vibrate with passages of passionate intensity, grand excesses of thought and feeling created out of the agonies of great souls at moments of intolerable stress, surging up again and again in such plays as Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and King Lear, to name the most obvious examples. By comparison, Julius Caesar must seem the least "poetic" of the plays, a masterpiece of the prosaic imagination.

Shakespeare, after all, was not one man but many.

FIRST PHASE -- CAESAR AND THE SEDUCTION OF BRUTUS

ACT I THROUGH ACT II, SCENE 1

Reference in Teacher Version	
p. 6	1. Do Flavius and Marcellus seem to fulfill their role as tribunes, elected guardians of the rights and privileges of the commoners? What attitudes do they display toward the people? Toward Caesar? Toward Pompey?
pp. 4, 6	2. What was the commoners' attitude toward Pompey in the past? What is the commoners' attitude toward Caesar? Do they seem easily swayed by the tribunes? If so, what might you expect from them in the actions which will follow?
p. 6	3. What is the significance of "disrobing" the statues of Caesar?
	4. Try to imagine how this scene might be set (I, 1)? How do the commoners dress and act? How would you arrange the people on the stage? How do the tribunes dress? How do they act and speak? What differences do you see between the language of the commoners and that of the tribunes? How do the commoners make their exit? What bit of humor does Shakespeare introduce in this scene? Do you think the cobbler is more clever than Flavius? Which one seems to win the battle of words?
p. 7	5. What is the Lupercalia? What political implication might be seen in Caesar's desire to have an heir?
p. 7	6. How can you interpret Caesar's willingness to answer the person who calls out his name? What warning does the soothsayer give Caesar? What might Caesar's lack of concern indicate?
pp. 8-10	7. Brutus and Cassius are left alone on the stage, and the conspiracy begins with Cassius taking the lead. What does Cassius say he has observed in Brutus lately? What does Cassius claim is his feeling for Brutus? Brutus's answer provides a splendid opening for Cassius to move a little more deeply into his plan. "Tell me, good Brutus," he says, "can you see your face?" Again the reply serves Cassius's purpose well. What does Cassius hint at in lines 61-67 (I, 2)? What is significant in Brutus's reply? That Cassius is clever is immediately apparent. Cassius offers himself as Brutus's mirror or glass. Where is the irony in this passage? What typical deception tactics does Cassius use in lines 71-83?
p. 10-11	8. Sounds of the festivities reach the ears of the conspirators. Do you think it is too soon to call Brutus a conspirator or do you think he is unaware of what Cassius is doing? Brutus claims to love Caesar. He claims to love the name of honor more than

he fears death. Remember these claims as the play progresses. Do you see what Brutus means when he says he is a man "with himself at war"? What are his feelings for Caesar? For the Republic?

9. Cassius is a master at deception. Follow the pattern of his thoughts as he manipulates Brutus. What "sure winners" does he employ in lines 96-105? What does he achieve by referring to Caesar's physical infirmities?

10. Again a flourish of trumpets reminds the two of Caesar's growing popularity and power. Cassius continues his flattery. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings. 'Brutus' and 'Caesar': what should be in that 'Caesar?' Why should that name be sounded more than yours?" Read lines 141-167 several times to savor their complete meaning. To what motive in Brutus does Cassius finally appeal? Discuss Cassius as you judge him from his words and actions up to this point in the play.

p. 13 11. Caesar and his train return. Cassius arranges to involve Casca in the conspiratorial conversation. How does Brutus determine that something of importance has transpired? How does Caesar analyze Cassius? How does Antony view him? Which of the two seems to be the wiser judge of human nature? What do you think is Antony's attitude toward Caesar?

p. 13-14 12. When Casca, Cassius, and Brutus are alone on the stage once more, Casca tells the others what has transpired at the festival. State briefly the chief events he relates.

13. Brutus and Casca, having arranged for a future meeting with Cassius, depart. Alone on the stage, Cassius reveals the next step in his plot. What does he reveal? Does Cassius still feel he must exert pressure on Brutus?

pp. 14-15 14. Scene 3 of Act I can be considered as a dramatic bridge connecting the seduction scene with the conclusion of the conspiratorial plot in Brutus's orchard (II, 1). In this scene the audience is, in a sense, prepared for the assassination of Caesar. Do the disorders in the natural world seem a reasonable parallel to the disorders in the world of man? Explain.

p. 15 15. What is the thematic signficance of Cicero's comments (I, 3, lines 33-35)?

p. 15-16 16. How does Cassius interpret the disorders in the world of nature?

p. 16 17. In light of Cassius's closing remarks to Casca, how do you view Cassius's earlier declaration of his love for Brutus?

p. 16-17

18. There is a danger of oversimplifying Brutus by assuming that he simply decides to assassinate Caesar for the good of the Republic. There can be much speculation about the complexity of Brutus. Consider the following. Which line in Act II, Scene 1, shows Brutus's resolution to join the conspirators? Which senator wants the conspirators to take an oath? What does this tell you about this senator? Where else in this scene did he reflect a similar attitude? In lines 10 to 34 Brutus seems to be constructing a solid basis for the decision that Caesar must die. Follow Brutus's reasoning. Caesar may become king, and this new role might change his nature. It is possible that Caesar may lose his capacity for mercy, for when a man climbs to new heights, he tends not to look down. Caesar, who, after all, is still a man, may follow this pattern. This is. Brutus's position. Does the real Caesar -- the Caesar Brutus knows -- indicate that he will follow this pattern? Where does the flaw lie in Brutus's rationalization?

p. 17

19; One must not, however, overlook the struggle he reveals in lines 81-89. What is his feeling toward conspiracy? Could this conflict be responsible for his downfall?

p. 17-18

20. In I, 1 when the conspirators meet Brutus, what does the group discuss as soon as they enter? Why don't they come to the point immediately? Cassius seems to have a special role in this gathering. What is it? Why do Cassius and the other conspirators need Brutus to participate?

p. 19

21. With a clasp of hands the conspirators are in common agreement, and Brutus assumes the role of leader. He immediately refuses to follow Cassius's proposal that Antony must fall with Caesar. This is the first of three occasions in the play when Brutus turns aside his friend's advice. How do their positions concerning what should or should not be done to Antony reveal something about each one's personality? Consider Cassius in particular. Is Cassius a good politician? Why? By the end of the play you will know whose judgment of men is really more valid, Cassius's or Brutus's. Why does Brutus have contempt for Antony? What does he not recognize in Antony? What similarities do you see between Cassius and Antony?

22. The last of II, 1 concerns an interchange between Brutus and Portia. Portia has observed the conspirators leave. It is quite late, but she has beenwaiting to talk to her husband. What has been bothering her? What sort of relationship has existed between Brutus and Portia? What word begins to appear over and over, first between Portia and Brutus and later when Caius visits? Pay particular attention to lines 334-335. What future developments of the play are foreshadowed?

SECOND PHASE: THE ASSASSINATION AND THE TRIUMPH OF ANTONY
ACT II, SCENE22 THROUGH ACT III

23. Act II, 2, 3, 4 continue to anticipate the future. Consider the connotative meaning of storm in terms of the conflicts in this drama. How many different storms does Shakespeare allude to by having one appear on the stage as a theatrical effect?

24. What dominant trait of Caesar's character appears in these scenes that might support your first impression of him?

25. Caesar is disturbed because Calpurnia seems to be on
edge. Why does she ask Caesar to stay home instead of
going to the capitol? Caesar is about to follow his wife's
advice when Decius Brutus changes his mind. How does
Decius Brutus manipulate Caesar? Do his comments about
p. 21-22 Calpurnia's dream change Caesar's plans? Can you see more
than one reason why Decius Brutus repeats to Caesar the
rumor earlier reported by Casca: "The Senate has concluded
to give this day a crown to mighty Caesar"? Which reason
do you think Decius Brutus really had in mind? Had Caesar
lived to be offered the crown for the fourth time, would he
have refused once more? Defend your position. Had the
conspirators any way of knowing what Caesar might have
done?

26. Read III, 1 (39-77). Does Caesar's attitude in these
p. 23 passages reinforce your answer to question 24? Reread
Brutus's soliloquy in the orchard (the beginning of Act II).
Do Caesar's remarks in lines 39-77 support Brutus's
earlier speculations about Caesar?

27. Considering what happens to Julius Caesar in III, 1, what is ironical about a comment he had made earlier (line 35)? What generalization about man as the controller of his destiny can be drawn from this irony?

28. Immediately after Caesar dies, Cinna shouts "Liberty!
p. 23 Freedom! Tyranny is dead!" To what lines spoken earlier
in the act by Julius Caesar, does this triumphant cry contrast?

29. How does Mark Antony react immediately after Julius
Caesar's death? What is the first thing he does? Later when he
returns to the assassins, how does he conduct himself?
p. 23 Pay attention to his manner of speech. Notice his manner
of bearing after he has been assured of his own safety.
(lines 162-176). Study lines 197-224. In what way might this
speech be considred as an overture to a shift of power in the
play? What line in the speech (lines 197-260) indicates whether

or not he has forgiven Brutus and his followers? How does Antony's shaking hands parallel a similar incident earlier in this play? How would you explain this as irony?

pp. 23-24 30. When Antony joins the assassins, he is quite confident -- almost to the point of boldness. How would you interpret his speeches from lines 208 to 220 and lines 233 to 237? Pay particular attention to lines 236 and 237.

31. Cassius objects to Antony's request to speak at the funeral ceremony. Once again he is overruled by Brutus. (Remember when Brutus turned down Cassius's proposal that Antony must fall with Caesar.) Why is Brutus not particularly worried about Antony?

p. 24 32. The assassins leave, and Antony, now alone, reveals in Scene II (lines 254-275) his true feelings toward the present state of affairs. How will he receive any explanation Brutus offers about the killing? In a soliloquy (lines 275-295) what future does Antony predict for the assassins as well as all of Rome? What new aspect of the play does this soliloquy introduce?

p. 25 33. The opening of Act III, 2 clearly announces the coming battle, first in the form of orations in the market place and later in the swords on the battlefield. The Plebeians demand satisfaction. They want to know why Julius Caesar lies murdered. Brutus is confident of his oratorical abilities. Read carefully Brutus's speech to his countrymen (lines 13-40). How does he justify the act? Notice that he uses prose. What can you say about words such as the following: cause, honor, respect, wisdom, love, fortune, valor, ambition, glory? Are they abstract or concrete? Do these words appeal to the heart or the mind? Now, look at some of his sentence structure.

> "Believe me for mine honor, and have respect to mine honor, that you may believe."
>
> "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more."
>
> "Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead to live all freemen?"
>
> "As Caesar loved me, I weep for him, as he was fortunate, I rejoice in it."

What rhetorical pattern makes these sentences appealing? Does the prose suggest that Brutus wishes to appeal only to the reason of his listeners? Does the crowd react in an emotional or a reasonable manner. (See lines 48-52.)

34. Now, consider Antony's speech (lines 80-113 and 129-148).
Locate areas where he appeals strictly to the emotion
(i.e., lines 111-114). Notice the concrete words Antony
p. 26 uses in describing Caesar and how he was murdered.
What does Antony achieve by reiterating that the conspirators
(and Brutus in particular) were honorable men? What evidence
does Antony offer to demonstrate that Caesar, while alive,
was not ambitious? (Lines 95, 96, 98, 101.) Why does
Antony refrain from reading the will immediately? How does
this maneuver strengthen his basic objectives for his speech?
What does he intend to accomplish through this speech?
Locate lines to support your view. What news does Antony
p. 27 receive about Lepidus and Octavius? What "savage spectacle"
occurs in Act III, 3? Can you see any reason why Shakespeare
included this scene?

THIRD PHASE: THE REVENGE OF CAESAR

ACT IV AND V

35. As the third phase of the drama begins, we see a world
of dissension. The bickering of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus
p. 28 does not seem important to the action of the play. It fore-
shadows, perhaps, the eventual war between Antony and
Octavius, a matter of history with which Shakespeare's
audience was generally familiar. But the growing dissension
between Brutus and Cassius, although not advancing the
main action, is of great and immediate concern as we try
to understand the characters of these two men. What is
the immediate cause of the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius?
Brutus says, "Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?"
Could he, perhaps, be questioning his own motives in the
assassination as he accuses Cassius of dishonor? Or is
he convinced that he was "strong in honesty"? What do
you think of Brutus's attitude toward Cassius? How does
Cassius react to Brutus's treatment? Very early in the
play Cassius declared his love for Brutus. Do you feel
that he was sincere in light of what you have learned in this
scene? Consider in particular IV, 3, lines 94-118. How
do the two seem to resolve their disagreement? Has your
attitude toward Cassius changed? Explain.

36. What is the purpose of having the poet enter? What is Cassius's attitude toward the poet? Brutus's attitude? Who shows the greater understanding of human nature? Defend your answer.

37. Compare Cassius's attitude toward Portia's death with
p. 29 the stoical calm which Brutus displays.

p. 29 38. For the third and final time Brutus overrules the counsel of Cassius. What arguments does Brutus give for the march on Philippi?

39. Just before the appearance of Caesar's ghost, there is music and song. How would the audience be affected? Does the ghost give any hint of what is to occur at Philippi?

40. The final act moves with great rapidity. Brutus and Cassius take formal leave of each other knowing that neither will be able to control the events which are to come. Cassius commits suicide. What does Titinius mean when he says, "Alas, thou hast misconstrued everything?" How do you react to Antony's generous tribute to the dead Brutus? Defend your answer.

41. In the introduction to the play given in the Student Version, a number of questions were suggested which you should be able to answer now that you have completed the play. Be prepared to discuss the issues suggested by the questions. Perhaps your teacher will suggest panel discussions or debates. Your understanding of the play as a whole will be greatly enriched by the sharing of intelligent, defensible opinions.

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

SELECTIONS FROM PLUTARCH'S "LIVES"
of
Julius Caesar
Marcus Brutus
Marcus Antonius

as translated by
SIR THOMAS NORTH
(1579)

Literature Curriculum IV

Teacher Version

PLUTARCH

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PLUTARCH

1. Plutarch and the *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans*[1]

Plutarch was born about 50 A.D. (almost a century after the assassination of Julius Caesar) in a provincial Greek town seventy miles or so northwest of Athens. At the time of his birth Greece had been under the political domination of Rome for nearly two centuries and its ancient greatness had passed into memory; but Plutarch, George Wyndham thought, was still a patriot and his historical writing was motivated at least in part by a desire to keep the memory of the old glory alive, an impulse of "romantic" nostalgia.

He was a teacher of Greek rhetoric and as such traveled in the Greek and Roman world as lecturer. It was as teacher--he was also on some sort of political mission, "the great business" of the following quotation --that he made his one visit to Rome, where, however, as he himself tells us,

> "I had no leisure to study and exercise the Latin tongue, as well for the great business I had then to do, as also to satisfy them that came to learn philosophy of me."

In Rome nevertheless he did the major research for the *Lives*, gathering material "out of divers books and authorities," and probably adding further to his knowledge and understanding of his still controversial subject by engaging in arguments with Roman friends over the political issues of the Rome of Caesar's era. Most of the *Lives*, however, were written in his Greek birthplace, the "poor little town" as he called it, where he remained "willingly lest it should become less."

The *Parallel Lives* as we have them consist of twenty-three pairs, a Greek and a Roman political hero in each pair, and most of the pairs followed by a comparative discussion, the Greek figure in Wyndham's opinion usually coming off better. It is a scheme probably unique in historical and biographical literature. Spencer's edition and our selections drawn from it are of course misleading in that the Greek parallel is in each instance ignored. In the original, Caesar is linked with Alexander, Marcus Brutus with Dion, Antonius with Demetrius, and Coriolanus with Socrates' friend Alcibiades.

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[1] The standard encyclopedias give brief accounts of Plutarch's life and work. George Wyndham's long essay, "North's Plutarch," originally prepared as an introduction to an edition of North but reprinted in his *Essays in Romantic Literature* (London, 1919) is a much more thorough treatment of Plutarch, North, the *Lives*, and Shakespeare's use of them. The present discussion is greatly indebted to Wyndham.

2. Sir Thomas North's Plutarch

The work of a translator is generally a thankless task, but North's "Englishing" of Plutarch has had acceptance as a classic in its own right. The second son of a minor aristocrat, North was born about 1535 (roughly thirty years before Shakespeare), and, after studying at Cambridge and Lincoln's Inn, he made a career of letters. He was given a command as Captain at the time of the Armada, was knighted about 1591 (Shakespeare then beginning his apprenticeship in the theater), and spent his last years in Cambridge. He lived long enough to have been able to see a production of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in London (there was no edition of the play before the 1623 Folio), but there is of course no evidence that he did.

In view of the reputation of his translation it is to the modern reader and interesting curiosity that North's Plutarch is not in literal fact fact a translation of Plutarch, but instead a translation of a French translation of the Greek writer (it is probable that North had very little Greek). The French translator was a Renaissance humanist named Jacques Amyot, whose version of the Lives appeared in 1559, twenty years before the 1579 publication of North's English version. Working at a time when Greek classics were difficult to come by in western Europe and knowledge of Greek itself still comparatively rare, Amyot was a careful scholar, his translation generally sound, and his French at once graceful and idiomatic.

North's translation of Amyot is faithful, Wyndham testifying that

> "I do not believe there are a score of passages throughout his 1175 folio pages in which he impairs the sense of his original."

Furthermore, even North's prose cadences apparently were matched to the rhythms of Amyot's French--"Sentence for sentence and rhythm for rhythm," Wyndham writes, "in all the great passages North's style is essentially Amyot's." Usually such devotion in a translation is disastrous; but North was saved by his feeling for the homely or racy English word or phrase, so that the result as a whole is a vigorous example of Elizabethan prose, the language of which obviously earned Shakespeare's admiration.

We shall, however, read North generally as if he were actually Plutarch. The Lives make good reading, and in the classroom should be allowed to inspire their own narrative interest. They are also a kind of history, and so make an occasion for raising some questions about the nature of historical, as different from imaginative, writing. Finally, reading them after a study of Shakespeare's play offers an opportunity for a new kind of literary study for high school students: the comparison of two versions of the same story, the one narrative-historical and the other dramatic, through which students may be brought to a better understanding of how the creative imagination works.

Turn first to the question of history.

3. Plutarch as Historian

Viewed from the perspective of modern historiography, Plutarch's Lives may not seem very much like "history" as it is now understood. The development in the last century or so of techniques of scientific rigor in the gathering and interpretation of evidence, revisions in the concept of historical causation involving among other things a shift of emphasis from historical personalities to underlying long-range impersonal forces or movements, the elimination from historical writing of moral judgments and, so far as possible, the personal political bias of the historian[2], would seem to discourage our thinking of Plutarch as an historian. Plutarch himself, in the preface to the parallel studies of Alexander and Caesar, warns against taking his work as history even as it was then understood--"my intent," he writes there, "is not to write histories but only lives"[1]--and the remarks that follow seem to indicate that his primary intention was moral: he would try to bring to life the careers of political and military leaders caught up in the tensions and conflicts of great historical events, revealing at once their nobility and their flaws and mistakes of judgment, in order to inspire emulation of their virtue and a wise prudence through contemplation of their errors.

We may be justified, however, in at least modifying his disclaimer. First of all, his work is exclusively devoted to actors in a political drama: there are no studies of the great Greek and Roman philosophers, dramatists, or sculptors. In the second place, his great men were not only "caught up in" the events that give them their importance, they were in a very real sense influencing the course of those events. The Parallel Lives as a whole have as their underlying subject the destinies not only of men but the destinies as well of two great political states and empires; in broad terms they trace the rise and tragic decline of Plutarch's native Greece set in contrast with Republican Rome undergoing constitutional transformation through its phase of military expansion (Greece one of its victims) until finally the Republic becomes Empire. The political history is seen of course in terms of the histories of individual men; but whether they are thought of as acting or being acted upon, men are the stuff of which history is made, and the history of Rome in the last century before Christ is as inconceivable without Sulla and Marius and Pompey and Caesar and Brutus as is the history of Nazi Germany without Hindenburg and Hitler and Goebbels and Goering.

Two features especially of Plutarch's work allow us to characterize it as historical in nature: (A) his concern with fact and the verification of fact, the research upon which it was based; and (B) the theoretical perspective from which the facts are viewed. A third, the moralist concern, makes the Lives "impure" history from the modern point of view; but this may lead only to the wry observation that the scientific bias of the modern historical monograph has in a sense dehumanized, which is to say, sterilized, history. The "humanized" history of Plutarch offers itself as an ideal introduction to the subject for young students.

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[2] Prof. F. B. Artz, in the Preface to his history of France (Reaction and Revolution, 1814-1832, New York and London, 1934): "Back of this book lie certain assumptions. Among these is my Liberal point of view, which I have tried to minimize but which I have not attempted to conceal."

A. Fact and the Verification of Fact

Plutarch obviously takes delight, as in reading him we do, in the assembling and reporting of facts for the great interest they have in their own right. Often they constitute a kind of social history, reconstructing as they do at once the habits and manners of a past age and the way of life of a particular man of that age. The interest such facts generate is not unlike the interest we find in many novels, and one modern editor of Plutarch observes that his work was popular in the 16th century in part because there were then no great novels and it filled that gap (when novels came into being in the 18th century their authors often called them "histories" and made claims for their "truth"). So, Plutarch's "characterization" of Julius Caesar:

> "He had always a secretary with him in his coach, who did still write as he went by the way, and a soldier behind him that carried his sword. He made such speed the first time he came from Rome, when he had his office, that in eight days he came to the river of Rhone. He was so excellent a rider of horse from his youth that, holding his hands behind him, he would gallop his horse upon the spur. In his wars in Gaul he did further exercise himself to indite letters as he rode by the way, and did occupy two secretaries at once with as much as they could write; and (as Oppius writeth) more than two at a time."

The parenthetical "as Oppius writeth" is Plutarch's version of the documentary footnote; and he often reports contradictions among his authorities without, in the lack of evidence that would allow final verification, attempting a resoltuion, a restraint imposed by his historical conscience. Thus he follows one report of Calpurnia's dream the night before the assassination with this cautionary statement:

> "Others also deny that she had any such dream; as, amongst other, Titus Livius writeth that it was in this sort: the Senate having set upon the top of Caesar's house. . . a certain pinnacle, Calpurnia dreamed that she saw it broken down and that she thought she lamented and wept for it. Insomuch that, Caesar rising in the morning, she prayed him if it were possible not to go out of the doors that day. . . ."[3]

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[3] In the first report, "she dreamed that Caesar was slain." In

Livy, the Roman historian born fifteen years before Caesar's assassination and therefore much closer to the events in question than Plutarch, was respectable enough as an authority, but Plutarch was content to leave his version in balance. He is openly uneasy, however, in dealing with a near-legendary figure like Theseus (paired with Romulus in the *Parallel Lives*): in this case the matter is "full of suspicion and doubt, being delivered us by poets and tragedy makers, sometimes without truth and likelihood, and always without certainty." So much for feigning poets.

The factual concern is clear. On the other hand, Plutarch identifies his sources only occasionally, and when he does they are not always written sources; he is often content with heresay evidence (for example, stories he had heard his grandfather tell); and he himself is sometimes inconsistent, as when in the "Caesar" it is Decius Brutus who keeps Antonius out of the Senate-house at the time of the killing, whereas in the "Brutus" that chore falls to Trebonius.

B. The Historical Perspective

Plutarch's theoretical perspective could not be easily deduced from the short selections we are reading, and indeed generally he is content to let the underlying significance simply emerge from his narratives as they unfold. There are, however, enough political generalizations and judgments scattered throughout the *Lives* as a whole to allow a formulation of his position. In our reconstruction here we shall rely heavily upon George Wyndham's summary.

Like the anti-Caesar party a century before his time, the Greek Plutarch was against hereditary monarchies, but he believed in strong rule and favored constitutional republics chiefly because he thought that in them the man "born to rule" was most likely to be given official rank. "It is essential," Wyndham writes in interpretation, "that the few, who are fit, shall direct and govern the many, who are not. If authority be impaired, whether by incompetence in the few or through jealousy of the many, then must disaster follow."

In the "Lycurgus" this principle is figured in the image of a horse and its rider, the horse representing the many, the rider the political authority, the image itself giving metaphorical significance to Plutarch's praise of Caesar's actual horsemanship. In the same "Life" he indicates his agreement with Lycurgus that the city-state should not seek to dominate

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Shakespeare's version (II-2, 11. 80f.) she saw Caesar's *statue* "run pure blood." The revision provides a dramatic parallel with Pompey's statue, which Antony says "all the while ran blood" at the time of the assassination. The playwright is less interested in fact than in dramatic effect.

other principalities, observing, in North's language, that "the felicity of a city, as of a private man, consisted chiefly in the exercise of virtue, and the unity of the inhabitants thereof." This anti-imperialist bias, however, was tempered by a rational objectivity of judgment, so that he was able to conclude, as Wyndham says, "that the rule of Rome was at last necessary for the rational and just government of the world."

So also with Plutarch's treatment of Caesar. His sympathy is nearly all with Brutus, although it is perhaps his admiration for Brutus' moral integrity rather than any doctrinaire republicanism that determined this inclination. He is, however, unambiguous in his condemnation of the "tyranny" of Caesar's life dictatorship, and near the end of his "Life" Plutarch writes:

> Caesar died at six-and-fifty years of age. . . So he reaped no other fruit of all his reign and dominion, which he had so vehemently desired all his life and pursued with such extreme danger, but a vain name only and a superficial glory that procured him the envy and hatred of his country.

Yet his admiration of Caesar's courage, self-control, and fitness for rule is as clear as his esteem for Brutus' virtue; and, having brought to conclusion the parallel lives of Brutus and the Greek Dion, in the comparison of the two that follows he finds greater justice in Dion's cause against Dionysius than in that of Brutus against Caesar. Dionysius, he says, "owned himself a tyrant, and vexed Sicily with a thousand oppressions"; whereas

> Caesar's power and government, when it came to be established, did indeed much hurt at his first entrie and beginning unto those that did resist him; but afterwards there never followed any tyrannical nor cruel act, but contrarily, it seemed that he was a merciful Physician whom God had ordained of special grace to be Governor of the Empire of Rome, and to set all things again at quiet stay, the which required the counsel and authority of an absolute Prince."[4]

So Plutarch after all seems to be working in the spirit at least of the modern historian Prof. Artz, who tried to "minimize" his bias without attempting to conceal it (see footnote 2).

The moral evaluations in the Lives are often hardly separable from the political judgments, and indeed it is clear that Plutarch's ideal homo politicus is one in whom power is wedded to virtue. He was, however, enough of a political realist to recognize and accept the fact that there may be crucial moments when, given the aim of a particular political action, the rule of expediency may, and perhaps even ought to, take precedence over all other considerations. So it seems, at least, in the passage in which he condemns Brutus for his decisions about the proposed assassination of Antonius and the reading of Caesar's will:

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[4] Compare the conclusion of the modern historian M. Rostovtzeff, who writes that, given the circumstances, "the only possible expedient" for Rome "was a constitution based on the military power of an individual--in other words, a system of monarchy was inevitable."

> Then Antonius thinking good his testament should be read openly, and also that his body should be honourably buried and not in hugger-mugger, lest the people might thereby take occasion to be worse offended if they did otherwise, Cassius stoutly spake against it. But Brutus went with the motion, and agreed unto it. Wherein it seemeth he committed a second fault. For the first fault he did was when he would not consent to his fellow conspirators that Antonius should be slain; and therefore he was justly accused that thereby he had saved and strengthened a strong and grievous enemy of their conspiracy. The second fault was when he agreed that Caesar's funerals should be as Antonius would have them;the which indeed marred all.

This is not piety, but a cool appraisal of political reality.

4. Historian and Playwright

The fact that all but perhaps one of Shakespeare's plays were based upon "sources" can be used to prompt some classroom discussion of the meaning of creative originality, perhaps of some special interest in an age in which the novel, the plots and characters of which are nearly always products as it seems of pure invention, is probably the dominant literary form. The following discussion will show some of the ways in which in reshaping his material Shakespeare truly creates. An analogy of the transformation of the prose narrative into the poetic drama is of course to be found in novel-based movies like Great Expectations, Lord Jim, High Wind in Jamaica, Lord of the Flies, etc.

There are, as one might expect, marked differences among the ways in which Shakespeare adapted his originals to his purposes. In the great tragedies, for instance, the source usually seems to provide hardly more than a narrative skeleton. He allows himself much less freedom in transforming the "plots" of Holinshed and Plutarch into the English historical plays and the Roman tragedies, indicating in the playwright a respect for more or less established historical truth. The case of Plutarch is somewhat special in that the classical historian's vision of Roman history is shaped so emphatically in terms of the moral dilemmas of its great actors and often with tragic effect; and the Lives are often dramatic in that Plutarch repeatedly provides speeches for his characters. Furthermore the prose of North's translation is often racy and frequently of impressive dignity, with the result that Shakespeare often seems to be working almost in paraphrase. In the Roman tragedies, then, as Derek Traversi says, "we are conscious of dealing with what might almost be called a collaboration." There should, then, be some special interest in examining the results of this famous teamwork in the classroom.

A. It is important first to establish significant differences, the most obvious of which derive from the fundamental differences between the narrative and dramatic modes. One aspect of this can be thought of in terms of the relationship between writer and audience; and the difference can be simply stated by saying that the narrative writer tells and the playwright presents, or shows. Plutarch stands in a direct relationship with his readers, as does, say, a college lecturer with his audience. Often, as in his comment on Brutus' two faults, he tells us in plain terms what he thinks, in a sense doing the reader's brain work for him. He is onstage. In contrast, the playwright stands in indirect relationship with his audience: the dramatic form itself keeps him offstage. His lines spoken by actors must do the whole work of communication, and the members of the audience in a sense must do their own brain work.

On the other hand, in the theater one has a much keener sense of having a direct and immediate experience with the historical material itself. We are there.

B. Tense: Historical Past and Dramatic Present

We are there. The historical past tense constantly emphasizes the temporal remoteness of the events narrated. Drama, on the other hand, employs a tense of the continuous present. The assassination is now, and we are eye-witnesses (subject to subpoena in the criminal court). There is a feeling of immediate and constant involvement. This is the source of the peculiar theatrical excitement, an effect other literary forms can only approximate, never actually produce. The theater is charged with emotion, and the aesthetics of the play form is inseparable from this excitement. The behavior of the rustic in the gallery who shouts warnings to the villain's intended victim although perhaps unsophisticated is not entirely inappropriate. He is there.

C. Faithfulness to Fact

We have noted that in turning Plutarch's narrative into dramatic action Shakespeare set limits to his artist's privilege of rearrangement, but nevertheless his play is clearly the work of the artistic rather than the historical genius. Many if not all of the events of the play are "facts" reported by Plutarch, which taken singly seem to have suffered little change in the transmutation: the removal by Flavius and Marullus of the ornaments from Caesar's images (although in Plutarch they are "diadems" not "scarfs"), the events of Lupercal, the portents, Portia's "voluntary wound" (why did Shakespeare suppress Plutarch's detail of the "little razor such as barbers occupy to pare men's nails"?), Caesar's hesitation about going to the Senate-house on the Ides, the killing at the base of Pompey's statue, etc., are all carried over, as events, from Plutarch with little or no change. This kind of faithfulness to the "facts," however, makes the Shakespearian revisions all the more significant and instructive.

First and most obvious is Shakespeare's selective suppression of a large body of biographical and historical detail in the interest of the compression demanded by his form (the actual extent of such exclusion is not fairly represented by our excerpts from the text, which were selected on the principle of close relevance to the drama). Compression also required a bold reduction of historical time spans, as reported by our editor of the play (Folger, p. x). Something more than economy is at work here, however: the near-juxtaposition of widely separated events, the suppression of what came between, clarifies the causal pattern essential to drama. The "plotting" of history is confused, most inartistic (the "clumsy work" of "stupid life" in the phrase of Henry James).

These changes appear, however, simply as acts of selection and abridgement and are really matters of form and emphasis more than of substance. They do not in any important way depart from Plutarch's report of the way he belived things happened. They reduce him only.

Shakespeare's inventions, his additons, expand Plutarch, introducing new elements in the psychology of his characters, challenging the audience with subtle revelations about the complex pattern of the play's tragic development, introducing shocks of irony, making finally a new thing out of the old familiar material.

D. Invention

A discussion of two instances of significant invention may serve as example, to be followed by suggestions for further comparative study.

The first instance seems simple enough but is significant. Of the attempt by Artemidorus to warn Caesar of the plot, Plutarch writes only that Caesar took the message,

> but could never read it, *though he many times attempted it*, for the number of people that did salute him; but holding it still in his hand, keeping it to himself, went on withal into the Senate-house.

In Shakespeare (III-1, 11. 6f.) Caesar makes no *attempt* to read the warning:

> Artemidorus: O Caesar, read mine first, for mine's a suit
> That touches Caesar nearer. Read it, great Caesar.
> Caesar: What touches us ourself shall be last served.
> Artemidorus: Delay not, Caesar! Read it instantly!
> Caesar: What, is the fellow mad?

The invention, "What touches us ourself shall be last served," substitutes a deliberate act of will, a public expression of political policy, for Plutarch's accident of the preventing crowd. It makes cause internal, at once psychological and political, instead of external, accidental. It is also an expression of selflessness, and, planted as it is by Shakespeare so shortly before Caesar's assassination, it casts strong doubt on the rightness of the conspiratorial cause. Plutarch obviously believes in Caesar's qualifications for rulership, his political responsibility; but there is nothing so clear-cut in Plutarch's account of Caesar as that one line Shakespeare writes for him: "What touches us ourself shall be last served."

Brutus, then. Plutarch briefly reports the agony of Brutus' inner conflict:

> Now Brutus, (who knew very well that for his sake all the noblest, valiantest, and most courageous men of Rome did venture their lives) weighing with himself the greatness of the danger, when he was out of his house he did so frame and fashion his countenance and looks that no man could discern that he had anything to trouble his mind. But when night came that he was in his own house, then he was clean changed. For, either care did wake him against his will when he would have slept, or else oftentimes of himself he fell into such deep thoughts of this enterprise. . . that his wife, lying by him, found that there was some marvellous great matter that troubled his mind. . . .

--and then Plutarch is off on the problem of Portia's anxiety. Beyond this there is no real psychological probing of Brutus in Plutarch; the action from this point on to the assassination is swiftly narrated, and of Brutus' funeral oration he says only that "when Brutus began to speak, they gave him quiet audience. Howbeit, immediately after, they showed that they were not all contented with the murder" (in the "Life" of Brutus there is no mention of Antony's oration).

The soliloquies in the orchard, then, and Brutus' speeches first to the conspirators and then to the populace, the whole tortured rationalization of the murder both before and after the act, are Shakespearian inventions. Our "guide" to the play has shown how these speeches add the related themes of self-deception and semantic evasion to the theme of Brutus' honor; this in effect introduces into the chain of tragic causation a personal moral or psychological flaw not present in Plutarch, producing an ambivalence in our attitude toward Brutus and allowing us to see a tragic justice in his destruction. The account of Plutarch is written in tragic vein, but it is conceived primarily in political rather than psychological terms, and its effect on the reader is much less ambivalent.

E. Other Suggestions for Comparison

Such examples as the foregoing may serve as suggestions of ways of leading high school students toward some understanding of the similarities and differences between Shakespeare's intention and Plutarch's, the differences in effect between dramatic and narrative art, literature and history, etc. It will be a new kind of experience for tenth-graders, and they should be encouraged to make their own comparative discoveries. A few other of the more obvious opportunities for parallel study, amplified in the Student Version, may be briefly identified here.

1. Plutarch, "Caesar," paragraph 10--"it was better to die once, etc."

Shakespeare, II-2, ll. 33f.--"Cowards die many times before their death. . . ."

What is the effect of Shakespeare's addition of the generalized statement about cowards and the "valiant"? Of the fatalistic conclusion of the speech?

2. Plutarch, "Caesar," paragraph 16--"I like not his pale looks . . . As for those fat men and smooth-combed heads, I never reckon of them. . . ."

Shakespeare, I-2, ll. 199-221--"Let me have men about me that are fat. . . ."

Note that in neither instance in the remarks reported by Plutarch is Caesar speaking to Antonius, and that in the second it is a response to a warning that Antonius is dangerous. Can students find ways of justifying such tampering with the "facts"? What is the effect of Shakespeare's expansion?

3. Plutarch, "Caesar," paragraph 18--"The Ides of March be come." "So be they," softly answered the soothsayer, "but yet they are not past."

Shakespeare, III-1, ll. 1-2--"The Ides of March are come." "Ay, Caesar, but not gone."

Very close paraphrase. What is the effect of Shakespeare's compression of the soothsayer's response?

4. Plutarch, "Caesar," paragraph 27--"Brutus and his confederates . . . called to the people to defend their liberty. . . ."

Shakespeare, III-1, 84-120--"Et tu, Brute? Then fall Caesar." "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!"

In Plutarch the call to the people seems spontaneous, and, imbedded as it is in a long summarizing sentence, is given no special emphasis. Shakespeare transfers the "call" from the market place to the scene of the crime, makes the first use of it follow immediately upon the assassination, and emphasizes it through repetition. Does it have the effect of a public relations scheme? Students may make these discoveries for themselves and should discuss the reasons for the changes.

5. Plutarch, "Brutus," paragraph 7--Cassius and his friends draw Brutus into the conspiracy.

Shakespeare, I-3, ll. 160-171--"O, he sits high in all the people's hearts. . . ."; and I-2, ll. 36-55--"--poor Brutus, with himself at war, / Forgets the shows of love to other men."

What is the effect, in Shakespeare, of the speech he wrote for Cassius, "Three parts of him is ours already," etc. ?

In Plutarch the reason for the estrangement between Brutus and Cassius is the latter's rancor caused by Caesar's having given Brutus the first Praetorship, himself the second. Shakespeare changes it to Brutus' withdrawal into himself under the stress of "passions of some difference." The petty jealousy is eliminated. Shakespeare's reasons? Other changes?

6. Plutarch, "Brutus," paragraph 20--"But there was a poet called Cinna. . . ."

Shakespeare, III-3 entire. "Tear him for his bad verses."

What reasons can students find for Shakespeare's expansion of Brutus' one-paragraph anecdote into a whole scene? What is the effect of "Tear him for his bad verses"?

7. Plutarch, "Brutus," paragraph 23--quarrel of Brutus and Cassius over the bribery of Pella.

Shakespeare, IV-3, passim.

Shakespeare's great quarrel scene is discussed in the Teacher Version to Julius Caesar. The chief difference from Plutarch is in the strong emphasis on the personal feeling of Cassius. Effect?

8. Plutarch, "Marcus Antonius," paragraph 5--Antonius "made a funeral oration in commendation of Caesar. . . ."

Shakespeare, III-2, l. 80 to scene-end.

Plutarch does not bring the two funeral orations into any coherent relationship, making no reference to Antonius' oration in the "Life" of Brutus (see paragraphs 14 and 15) and none to Brutus' speech in the "Life" of Antonius. Shakespeare's great scene probably represents his boldest imaginative re-ordering of the Plutarch material.

F. Conclusion

"History" in the sense of what happened is life itself in its totality, confused, often apparently chaotic, seeming to drift without direction, or with only the "direction" of the obscure motives of men working cross-purposes. Written history makes the attempt to find a pattern, some kind of order, in the confused appearances of life, but without violating the facts, without redesigning the events as they are known. Literature also imposes an order upon the chaos of life, but is concerned, in doing so, less with the "truth" of facts than with imaginative truths about the whole meaning of human experience. The truth of the poet need not be called a "higher" truth than the truth of the historian. The truth of the poet and the truth of the historian support and inform each other, and together constitute two of the richest sources of human enlightenment.

This perhaps is the ultimate significance of the "collaboration" between Plutarch the historian and Shakespeare the poet.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. Plutarch's History

1. Read the selection from Plutarch's "Life" of Caesar. What qualities does Caesar have that support the idea that he was a great political leader? What is your impression of Plutarch's attitude toward Caesar? What passages in Plutarch's essay can you refer to in support of your answers?

2. Read the selection from the "Life" of Brutus. What passages would you use to defend the view that Brutus was acting nobly in joining with Cassius and the other conspirators? What do you think is Plutarch's view? Is he ever critical of him?

3. Read the short selection from the "Life" of Marcus Antonius. How does his character compare with that of Caesar? Of Brutus? Of Cassius? On the basis of what you have read, who of the four do you think was best qualified for political leadership?

4. On the basis of your reading of Plutarch, what would you say "history" is? The preceding questions have had to do with interpretation and judgment. Do you think they are proper questions for historians to try to answer? Do you think you have been operating as historians in trying to answer them?

5. Re- read paragraph 6 in the "Life" of Caesar. Why does Plutarch insert in parentheses, "as Oppius writeth"? Re-read paragraph 19 in the same "Life." Why does Plutarch give two versions of Calpurnia's dream without saying which he thinks is right? What do these questions suggest further about the writing of history? Do you think written history necessarily involves uncertainty? Why, do you think?

6. Re-read paragraphs 8 and 9 in the "Life" of Caesar. Do they deal with causes? Causes of what? Is the problem of causes important in the study of history? Why do you think so?

7. Re-read paragraph 10 in the "Life" of Marcus Brutus. Consider especially the sentence, "But when night came that he was in his own house, then he was clean changed," and the sentence following. How could Plutarch have known this? Do you think such statements should be offered as history? In the light of your answer, what is your view of Plutarch as historian?

8. Re-read paragraph 18 in the "Life" of Marcus Brutus. Remember that after one of his triumphs Pompey the Great had had his own statue set up in the Forum, and that Caesar later fought and defeated Pompey.

What do you think of Plutarch's "manifest proofs" that it was not chance but "the ordinance of some god that made this treason to be executed specially in this place"?

9. Epicurus, referred to in the second half of the same paragraph, was a Greek philosopher who developed an atomic theory of the universe, did not believe that the motions of the stars were controlled by the gods, and attacked superstition. Can you tell from Plutarch's account of Cassius' asking the aid of Pompey's statue, following as it does upon the historian's "proofs" of the "ordinance of some god," whether Plutarch subscribed to the principles of Epicurus? Is Plutarch passing judgment on Cassius in this paragraph? If you think so, what is his judgment?

10. If you were going to write a history of, say, the Presidential election of 1964, upon what kinds of evidence would you base it? What questions about it would you, as historian, try to answer? What uncertainties might you encounter in performing this task?

B. Plutarch and Shakespeare

1. Re-read paragraph 13 in the "Life" of Brutus and compare it with the conspirators' debate on the problem in Julius Caesar, II-1, ll. 165-201. How do the reasons for killing Antony summarized by Plutarch differ from those advanced by Cassius in the play? Note that Cassius' speech in the play is much less detailed and explicit than Plutarch's summary? Why do you think Shakespeare boiled it down in this way?

On the other hand, Brutus' speech against killing Antony is a considerable expansion of Plutarch's report. What is the general effect of the expansion?

The lines beginning, "Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Cassius," have no equivalent in Plutarch. What is Shakespeare's purpose in making this addition? Do you think the playwright is justified in thus going beyond the reported facts? Explain your answer.

2. Re-read paragraph 18 in the "Life" of Brutus. Is there any doubt about Plutarch's view of Brutus' "faults" (mistakes)? Brutus takes the same two positions in the play. Do you think Shakespeare wants us to see them as clearly mistakes? Can you be sure?

3. What kind of relationship do you feel you have, as reader, with the author Plutarch? How do you feel about your relationship with the author Shakespeare?

Plutarch "tells" us about something, Shakespeare shows us what seems to be the same thing. What are the differences in effect of the two ways of communicating?

4. Re-read the last sentence of paragraph 10 in the "Life" of Caesar, then the corresponding passage in the play (II-2, 11. 33f.). How do the two passages differ in style? What is the difference of the two in their effect on you?

5. Compare Plutarch's description in the "Life" of Caesar of what follows the assassination in paragraphs 26 and 27 with Shakespeare's version in III-1, 11. 84-133. Discuss, again, the differences of effect.

6. Re-read paragraph 5 in the "Life" of Marcus Antonius, which is Plutarch's description of Antony's funeral oration. Compare it with the oration Shakespeare wrote for Antony. What differences in content and otherwise do you find? How would you account for them?

7. Re-read paragraph 9 in the "Life" of Marcus Antonius. How does Plutarch's account of Antonius' reception of the severed head and hand of Cicero affect you? Why do you think Shakespeare chose not to work such an incident into the play?

8. On the basis of your speculations on the preceding questions, try to draw some conclusions about the differences between historical biography and drama.

Do you think it is useful to try to understand such differences? Why or why not?

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Literature Curriculum IV

Teacher Version

Teacher Version

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Looking back on one's childhood may be a means of understanding what one is today. "The child is father of the man," said Wordsworth, and recently Sean O"Faolain found the same idea a fitting conclusion for his autobiography: "If once the boy within us ceases to speak to the man who enfolds him, the shape of life is broken and there is, literally, no more to be said." If, as these imaginative writers believe, the child within determines the shape of the self, it is through a return to childhood memories that the adult can define himself and his existence as an individual. Of this view, Dylan Thomas is an eloquent spokesman in his "Poem in October":

> And there could I marvel my birthday
> Away but the weather turned around. And the true
> Joy of the long-dead child sang burning
> In the sun
> It was my thirtieth
> Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
> Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.
> O may my heart's truth
> Still be sung
> On this high hill in a year's turning.

To discover the "heart's truth" is the underlying purpose of every autobiography worthy of the name. The seriousness with which the autobiographer, as distinct from the memoirist or reminiscer, approaches his work may be illustrated both by ancient and modern preoccupations with the self as a subject of inquiry. Although the older examples of introspective autobiography are likely to study the growth of the self in relation to God, the more modern are inclined to an equally religious search for the authentic self and its destiny. From The Confessions of St. Augustine to The Prelude of Wordsworth is less a jump than it seems. In both accounts, external events are selected according to the writer's religious view of his own existence. But no autobiography would be possible without some sense of the self as a definite form. That is why the very young are seldom fitted to write fully developed autobiography: they have not discovered their own potentialities, let alone chosen which ones they will develop. Yet it is not necessary for people to be old before they make parables out of their lives. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly common for autobiographies to be written in middle age, at a time when people tend to take stock of themselves and look back over the road they have come. And given the possibility of still changing his life, the middle-aged autobiographer may use the writing of his life as a means of self-exploration; his life-story may well take on a more marked urgency than one written by a man near to the end of his life and seemingly beyond much real possibility of change.

Perhaps here we have a clue to the kind of creative activity that consists in writing an autobiography. If it is not the mere recalling of the past that makes autobiography an effective means of self-discovery, what is it? The artistic discipline involved in creating a meaningful pattern from the flux of life helps also to create an identity for the individual who writes his autobiography. In discovering the point of view that selects his memories, the writer discovers himself. His first task as an autobiographer, then, is to identify and make explicit this point of view by which alone his personality makes itself apparent both to himself and to his readers.

Thus point of view becomes everything in autobiography. Events have no intrinsic importance, no matter how earth-shaking, for personality holds the stage and selects without caprice the happenings that have meaning to the individual who tells his story. A child will certainly be more emotionally affected by what happens in his immediate family circle than by what happens on the international scene, and an autobiography of childhood must give more room to a mother's death than to the explosion of the first atomic bomb.

And it is point of view that determines not only the selection of incidents in an autobiography but their presentation. Depending, for example, on whether the writer views his life as the growth of a sensibility or the growth of an intellect, his autobiography will approach either the form of a novel or the form of a history. These are the extremes between which every autobiography is destined to move. Both chronicle and interpretation require the objectivity of the historian; to convey the feel of an experience requires the art of the novelist. Considering the age of the students, however, it has seemed more profitable to choose autobiographies that tell a story, rather than those that trace intellectual or spiritual commitment and development. As Keats noted in one of his letters, the life of sensation precedes the life of thought, and the genius of many good autobiographies has been to preserve the values of this childhood existence. But what the child or young person could not fully understand, the adult looks back upon in order to understand. Hence, in recreating early experiences, autobiographers wish both to represent the childhood view and to comprehend its significance in the light of their more developed destinies. The raw materials of sensation are transmuted into thought, while preserving much of the first sensuous impact.

This recreation of experience causes the art of autobiography to touch the art of the novel. Indeed, some autobiographies, such as Laurie Lee's, have a richness of sensuous detail that brings us close to an autobiographical novel such as Tolstoy's, excerpts from which we have included here. Nevertheless, the structure of a novel is basically different from the structure of autobiographical sketches such as Laurie Lee's and Mary McCarthy's. Even when a novel is as close as possible to the author's life, it is dominated by an imaginative pattern. Tolstoy, for example, in his own life lost his mother when he was a year and a half old; in his autobiographical novel, however, he represents his mother as living until he is considerably older. Evidently, in writing his novel he felt a need to show as conscious experiences both the possession and the loss of a mother's love. Although memory itself may be incomplete, a novel must be complete. Thus the novelist must recreate forgotten conversations; he must dramatize everything in such a way as to give a sense of an eternal present, even though the tense is past. The autobiography, on the other hand, no matter how vividly it recreates the past, does so with the sense of looking back at an experience that cannot, in the nature of things, be relived but only recalled. In short, autobiography is distinct from the novel in its relationship to objective reality. Instead of having an imaginative pattern in the form of a plot, it takes as its narrative plan the actual life of an individual. It cannot alter this life without becoming fiction; hence one limitation on the autobiographer is a given body of fact, out of which he creates form.

But assuming that autobiography is the interpretation of a life by one who is in possession of all the facts, how does it differ from biography? The answer is that for conveying immediacy of experience, nothing can take the place of the person involved in it. What every dramatist and every novelist who uses first-person narrative knows, is also the secret of autobiography. In general, autobiography is a richer form of art than biography. When a person sets out to formulate his life, his creative capacities are as important as his intellectual grasp. It may be that biography does not provide the same stimulus to the creative understanding because the subject of a biography is usually beyond the power of the biographer to affect by his writing, whereas autobiography is itself enmeshed in the life of the writer. Perhaps the secret of Boswell's great Life of Johnson is that it is as much the autobiography of Boswell as the biography of Samuel Johnson. As a form-giving activity, autobiography takes precedence over biography, demanding as it does a reconciling of the external appearances of a life--its collision with reality--and the internal or subjective experience, which may even take a path quite apart from the public value of the autobiographer's life. The quotation from Einstein that closes this unit aptly states the difference between the inner life of a man and the outer effects. And only the individual himself can be the authority on the realities of this inner life. No matter how much research a biographer has done, he cannot get inside the skin of his subject. The autobiographer's authority is, then, absolute, and this is why the list of notable autobiographies will always exceed the list of notable biographies.

Now a word or two about the selections themselves. They begin with the very foundations of existence; that is, the needs of the individual for things outside himself. These selections are a reminder that no one is self-sufficient but dependent in some degree on other people. From the need for love, so amply supplied in Laurie Lee's boyhood, we move first to the unsatisfied needs of Frank O'Connor for a reality to correspond with his fantasy world, and then to the lack of love that Mary McCarthy endured in childhood. The order of these selections is roughly one of difficulty, so that in each division of the unit, the last selection may be omitted for less advanced students.

From childhood needs, we pass to some descriptions of the learning process, beginning with the most recognizable kind of learning--that which is done in school--and proceeding to artistic learning as depicted in Elizabeth Bowen's description of her dancing classes. Finally, this section ends with the kind of learning and that comes through suffering. Arthur Koestler's early traumatic experiences and loneliness provide him with his first spiritual lessons.

The third section touches on some phases of the transition from childhood to maturity. First, three short descriptions from Tolstoy's autobiographical novel reflect the changing quality of experience as a child becomes a youth. Secondly, an account by Lincoln Steffens of his experiences with the State Legislature portrays a child's dawning awareness of some of the defects of the adult world, of the difference between appearance and reality, between the civics textbook and the statehouse. Then a further selection from Tolstoy serves as a telling commentary on a young person's religious experiences. We close with a brief passage from Einstein on the inner and outer life--one of the primary aspects of existence explored by autobiography.

It is hoped that from reading these selections the students will come to see that their own lives are the stuff of autobiography. Writing about their own memories can provide them with a first-hand experience of artistic creation. If they can see that a life is more than a chronicle of events, they will have at their disposal a never-ending source of raw materials for writing. What the study of biography cannot do for students --that is, inspire them with the creative potentialities of their own memories--autobiography can do. This is why we have devoted an entire unit to this type of literature.

II. NEEDS, SATISFIED AND UNSATISFIED

1. Laurie Lee, "The Kitchen," in The Edge of Day (some passages of dialogue omitted because of difficulties in dialect.)

Nostalgia is clearly the inspiration of Laurie Lee's re-creation of his childhood in the West of England. Although the sensuous vividness of the writing reminds one of an autobiographical novel, it is clear that the writer's point of view excludes the dramatic development of action that is needed to make a novel move. Instead, Laurie Lee is evoking typical experiences with no particular dramatic function in a line of plot.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why does Laurie Lee still dream of this untidy past life of his childhood? Can you account for the pleasure that he takes in recalling a not very prosperous way of life?

2. Compare this kind of childhood with that of the child who has been given every so-called advantage. Do good schools, plenty of food, and plenty of privacy--all the things that might be considered advantages --necessarily provide a better environment for a poet to grow in?

3. Is this account of daily life in the kitchen arranged in any particular order? -- After the introductory explanation of the family situation and a brief description of the kitchen, the events of a typical day are described, beginning with waking up in the morning and ending with sleep at night.

4. What does Laurie Lee mean by saying that they never felt overcrowded in the kitchen, "being as separate as notes in a scale"? What are the implications of this comparison? -- The family forms a harmony, composed of separate individuals. They both keep their individuality and form a family.

5. Consider the one-paragraph description of the kitchen: what prevents it from being just a list of objects in a room? What is the untidiness of the room made to represent? -- Lee's view of the room unifies the description. He is describing a room whose untidiness suggests life at its most untidy but also at its most rich for the imagination.

6. What metaphor is used in the description of the kitchen to convey its effect on the imagination? Why is it appropriate? -- The metaphor of the sea suggests the life of the imagination.

7. Can you describe the prevailing mood of this selection? Is there any connection between this mood and the way Lee describes his past life? Why does he not simply summarize what happened, instead of giving such a detailed description? -- Nostalgia demands a re-creation of experience.

8. Does this selection sound like part of a novel? How does it differ from a novel? -- Bits of dialogue (some of which have been omitted), as well as vivid description, help this piece to sound something like an excerpt from a novel, but the emphasis on the typical rather than on dramatic development distinguishes it from a novel.

9. A writer must always be faced with the choice of what to describe in detail and what to mention as merely one element in a situation. For example, find the reference to Laurie Lee's drawing of pictures in the evening. How much detail is there? Now read the paragraph (p. 13 of this unit) from Tolstoy's autobiographical novel in which he describes a similar evening scene with the family. Why has Tolstoy given us these details? What difference does it make in the focus? You might compare focusing with a camera: if you focus on something in the foreground, the background will be blurred. What is Laurie Lee's focus as compared with Tolstoy's? -- Lee is focusing on the total scene; hence his own action is a relatively minor detail in the scene. Tolstoy is focusing on himself; the other elements are in the background.

10. Laurie Lee does not limit his description to visual details. Find examples of other sense impressions that he uses to give you a sense of his experience.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

a. Describe a childhood scene in which you play a major part and one in which you play a minor part. When you are playing a minor part, what is your focus in your description? Or describe an object in a room or in nature that stands out from its background, and one which forms part of the scene.

b. Refer back to Laurie Lee's one-paragraph description of his kitchen and then write a description of your favorite room in your house. Try to describe it in such a way as to let the reader share your feeling for the room.

2. Frank O'Connor, "Christmas," from An Only Child

Again, a novelist's eye is suggested by the style of this autobiography, but it is not so nostalgic in point of view, and hence not so lush in style. O'Connor is also a little more detached in his view of his past, whereas Lee was concerned mainly with evocation.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is dramatic about the way this selection opens? -- Since Christmas is supposed to be a happy time, there is some shock value in saying that it was always the worst time of the year.

2. What does O'Connor mean by saying "It was the season of imagination. My trouble was that I already had more than my share of imagination"? -- The dream world he believed in was intensified by the Christmas magazines. Unfortunately, the realities of his life kept breaking the beautiful illusion.

3. How does the incident of washing his hands and face in snow act as one illustration of the general theme of the story? -- The romance of snow is dimmed by the robust realism of his father.

4. In this reference to the meaning of snow to the young Frank O'Connor, how does the adult view of the writer play a part? -- O'Connor discusses the important symbolic meaning of the snow in contrast with the candles, fires, and windows.

5. Find other indications that this account is written by an adult looking back on childhood experiences. -- References to "years later" and "I later discovered" make the adult view explicit, though the whole style implies an adult's rather than a child's view.

6. Compare this selection with the one by Laurie Lee. What similarities and differences can you find? Consider particularly the point of view. -- See the note in 5, above. Does it seem more humorous or more sad? Which dominates O'Connor's account? -- The humor dominates, but there is still a little pathos.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Can you recall a childhood disappointment, some conflict between what you expected and what came, a conflict between imagination and

reality? Describe this incident. How does it now appear to you?

2. Every family has certain customs or ceremonies that are attached to special occasions. O'Connor mentions Christmas customs that probably strike you as strange. Write an account of how you usually spend Christmas or any other special occasions, making particular mention of traditional family customs.

3. Mary McCarthy, "A Tin Butterfly," from Memories of a Catholic Girlhood

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What seems wrong with the house where Mary McCarthy lived as a child? It is described in the third paragraph as "simply a crude box, in which to stow furniture, and lives, like a warehouse."

2. Why does Mary go to bed after her beating, "with a crazy sense of inner victory, like a saint's"? In what sense had she played the part of a saint, or imagined that she had?

3. When Mary, protesting her innocence in the theft of the butterfly, says, "He can't punish me, Aunt Margaret," what view of the world does she hold? Is she right?

4. How is Mary McCarthy's later knowledge about the adventure of the tin butterfly used to give the story a dramatic completeness? Would you have suspected that Uncle Myers was the culprit anyway, without the later revelation by Preston? -- Although one naturally suspects Uncle Myers, the confirming of one's suspicions at the end of the story seems to complete the story.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. From reading these selections, can you decide what a child's most important need is? Write a few paragraphs giving reasons for your statements and illustrating them with examples.

2. Choose some trivial incident or object that was important to you as a child and describe it in such a way as to show the reader how important it was to you. Consider what Mary McCarthy does with the painted tin butterfly, which, as she says, had no intrinsic value.

III. LEARNING

1. Winston Churchill, "School Days," from A Roving Commission

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What conflict is there between Churchill's interests and the demands of his school? Do you think that this conflict ultimately did him any harm?

2. What is Churchill's tone as he says, "We were considered such dunces that we could learn only English"?

3. Read again Churchill's summary statement about his education at Harrow. "I can only record the fact that, no doubt through my own shortcomings, I was an exception. . . . . Also I should have got to know my father, which would have been a joy to me". Do you think there is any connection between his inability to learn academic subjects and his lack of acceptance at home?

4. Can you see what qualities of the young Churchill would later make him a great leader? How are these qualities illustrated in his anecdotes?

5. Now consider Churchill's fondness for battle metaphors. Find examples in this selection and say what this taste indicates about his view of life.

6. Why do you think Churchill said "Most of the boys were happy, and many found in its classrooms and upon its playing fields the greatest distinction they have ever known in life." Is it "sour grapes"? Is he justifying his own failure at school in the light of his later success in life? Or is he saying that as a preparation for life, school procedures have serious shortcomings? Can you tell from the tone of the paragraph just exactly what meaning he intends the reader to take from the statement?

7. What did Churchill think an education should consist of? Was he serious about this, or speaking tongue in cheek? How do you know?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Churchill describes his experience with mathematics in a humorous and vivid way. Could you do the same for some subject that you dislike? Try to do this in a page or two. If you admit, as Churchill does, that this is a purely personal point of view, you have a better chance of winning your reader's sympathy than if you simply denounce in general terms.

2. What are the qualities that make a great leader? Do you think Churchill achieved his position of leadership because of his schooling, or in spite of it? Give reasons and examples to support your ideas.

2. Elizabeth Bowen, "Dancing in Daylight," from Seven Winters: Memories of a Dublin Girlhood

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the title? What kind of atmosphere is suggested by dancing in daylight? Consider the statement "The sun was made theatrical and unlikely by the pertinacious drumming of the piano." -- Elizabeth Bowen sees something so strange about dancing in daylight that everything becomes slightly unreal.

2. What contrast is there between the dancing teacher and her pupils? Are you made to see how she might feel despair? -- She is an artist; the pupils are clumsy oafs by comparison.

3. What is mistaken in the governess's view that Elizabeth Bowen could waltz if she tried? Why does the author comment "How little she knew"? -- It was quite beyond Elizabeth's power to waltz well by trying; hence she describes her moment of success as occurring as if "a spring released itself in my inside."

4. How do the portraits of Mavis and Paula G. and of Fergus play a part in the writer's creation of an atmosphere? -- These children also seem a little theatrical and unreal.

5. How does learning an art such as dancing differ from the learning done at school? Does Elizabeth Bowen give a clue to a possible difference when she tells how one day she could suddenly waltz? -- In any artistic activity, success seems partly at least to depend on some release from conscious control. But of course a great deal of preparation may have made this moment of success possible.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe an experience of learning some activity or skill such as painting, singing, writing, dancing, skiing, swimming, or surf boarding. Try to convey the atmosphere of one particular moment of learning, whether a successful or an unsuccessful one.

3. Koestler, "Ahor and Babo" and "The Hour Glass," from Arrow in the Blue: an Autobiography

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Could you mistake this selection for a piece from a novel? -- No, Koestler is too clearly looking back at the facts of his past life.

2. What does Koestler mean by saying, "It was as if I had fallen through a manhole, into a dark underground world of archaic brutality"? -- A torture chamber, literally. The horror of threatening experiences.

3. How do Ahor and Babo dramatize the childhood experiences that Koestler describes? -- These invented terms symbolize the opposites that loom so large in the child's world, and an attempt to reduce them to manageable size.

4. How does Koestler go beyond mere reminscing to show the significance of childhood experiences? Find references to the connections between early experiences and his later life.

5. What does the hour glass symbolize for Koestler? -- The ephemeral character of pleasure

6. Why does the sight of snowflakes soothe the young Koestler as he is on his way to the hospital? -- He feels himself a part of nature and can therefore accept whatever comes. The snow can also symbolize a shutting-out of reality.

7. How can unpleasant or frightening experiences be instructive? What does Koestler learn from his terrifying experiences? From his loneliness?

8. You have now had examples of three kinds of learning -- learning in the school-room, learning an artistic activity, and learning by suffering --can you see any common purpose in all these kinds of learning? -- All help to shape the individual. Though creating a work of art may seem to be shaping other materials, it also helps to shape the individual who creates the work.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Choose an incident of fear or loneliness in your own life and show its possible value as teaching you something.

2. Do you have a Baron in the Bog method of helping yourself in situations of difficulty? Describe it, inventing a name for your procedure if you have not already given it a name.

3. More than physical pains, the belief that he had been deserted by his parents, that they too were helpless and afraid, caused acute suffering to the sensitive child. Does this kind of experience teach a true lesson, or does it give a distorted view of life? Express your ideas in a few paragraphs, giving examples either from your own experience, or from other people you know of.

IV. GROWING UP

Tolstoy, selections from Childhood, Boyhood, Youth

a. "How I Prepare for the Examination"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What details help to convey the sense that studying for exams may be very difficult? What would your own list of distractions be? Write a paragraph describing your feelings as you try to study amid distractions that come mainly from your own day-dreams.

2. Is there any relationship, do you think, between Tolstoy's day-dreaming and his becoming a novelist? Is there any difference between the ordinary day-dreamer who will never do anything creative and one who will use his dreams to create something?

b. "I Am Grown Up"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In spite of the differences between this young man's experience and an American boy's in the 1960's, can you find any elements of the description that strike you as familiar? How do you explain these similarities between growing up as a Russian boy of the early nineteenth century and growing up as an American boy about 150 years later?

2. Why does the boy who tells the story have to buy the same things that his older brother, Volodya, bought when he entered the university?

3. Of course, in Tolstoy's account of growing up, we have a contrast between the person he would like to be—that is, a poised young man of the world--and the person he actually is. What details are used to illustrate the incompleteness of his transition to adulthood?

4. Is there any indication that this account is not written by a boy but by an adult? What clues can you find that tell you that the writer has finished with this particular stage of growing up? -- The writer's detachment and humor are implicit in every detail, such as the boy's desire to have someone see him "in that dazzling state," with his new uniform.

5. How does one moment of this whole experience lead to the next? Has the writer made the order of events convincing?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do you notice any difference in style between this selection and the preceding ones? It might help you to understand the difference if you realize that the Tolstoy passages are from an autobiographical novel, not a straight autobiography. Although this novel is based on Tolstoy's own life, he does not have to confine himself to the facts but can use his imagination to invent forgotten details or create experiences that he feels his story demands. Try to turn some incident from your own life into a short piece of autobiographical fiction by portraying yourself, not as you actually were in the situation, but as the person you would like to be.

2. Take the incident in which the boy smokes his pipe: how does this rather commonplace incident become interesting? One person might sum it up in a sentence: "I tried smoking for the first time and felt sick." What does Tolstoy do to enable you to share the experience? Now take some equally ordinary experience and make it interesting to a reader by showing it as if you were the first person in the world to have this experience.

c. "The Return Home"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If everything is so much the same in the old house, why have the rooms grown smaller and lower? Which is emphasized here, the actual appearance of the rooms or the way they look to the boy who returns after a long absence? -- The boy's point of view is the focus of attention in the description, which exists only to convey his state of mind.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

The relationship of a person to a place is a changing one, especially noticeable if the person goes away for some time and then returns. Have you had a similar experience of coming back to a place and finding it physically unchanged but different because you have changed? Write an account of this experience in such a way that the reader will understand the change that occured in you.

2. Lincoln Steffens, "A Painter and a Page," from The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. It is a far cry from a picture of the mud flats of the American River to the State Capitol. How does Steffens unify the two main scenes of this chapter? What is he trying to do? How successful do you think he was? -- This should open up the question of the relation between form and subject. Steffens needs the incident of the painter to illustrate his response to the political situation he observes. The two parts of the chapter are not brought directly into relation until the final lines, but then the whole chapter assumes a unity of form and effect. A full understanding of his feelings about the political situation cannot be achieved until the point of the painting incident is clearly apprehended.

2. Both the painting and the political sections of this chapter can be said to deal with a basic conflict or contrast. What is it? -- Basically, the contrast between appearance and reality. This perception can be seen as one of the factors involved in the transformation of the child to the adult, part of the process of "growing up."

3. What difference is there in the two incidents? -- In the painting section, the beauty in the scene is accepted and understood. In the political section, Steffens cannot understand why no one else can see the "beauty" in the actions of the Johnsons.

4. In the last paragraph Steffens asks a question which he does not answer. What question is he asking? Why doesn't he answer it? Can you answer the question?

5. Why did Steffens lay the question aside? -- He is, after all, still a young boy. Awareness of such questions is plenty of growing up to do. When older and more experienced, he will come back to a question which is too difficult for him now.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Steffens states that his experience with the way politics really worked was a "revelation" and a "revolution." Write a chapter from your own autobiography in which you describe a similar experience which had a permanent effect on you.

3. Tolstoy, "Confession"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why does Tolstoy describe the appearance of each member of the household as he or she comes out of the room for saying confessions? -- Since it is a very private matter, there is no other indication of what went on in the confession room, except the appearance of the people as they come out.

2. The boy in the story is always very concerned about his appearance. Why does he say, "I should have liked to change my exterior, just as I thought all my interior had been changed"? Does it have anything to do with letting the world know how he has changed? Consider his eagerness to be admired by the cab driver after the visit to the monastery.

3. In the scene of the visit to the monastery, what do details of the frosty morning and the aged cab contribute to the adventure?

4. Why is the priest's room described in such detail? -- We see it through the boy's eyes. We are taken right into the situation with him.

5. How much of the boy's motive in going to the second confession seems to you to be a religious one? Consider, for example, his speculations about what the priest will think of him.

6. What contrast is there between what the boy thinks the cab driver is thinking of him and what the man is actually thinking as revealed by the remark "Just the thing for gentlefolks"? -- Of course the cab driver is thinking that all this concern for the soul is a luxury that only the rich can afford.

7. Does the conclusion of this incident seem appropriate or inappropriate to the character of the boy? Is there any contradiction between his desire for a pure soul, as illustrated by his double confession, and his anger at not having a new suit to wear to church? Do you think that he is unusual in his shifts of feeling, or is this fairly common to the young?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Have you ever done something, thinking to make a fine impression, only to find your action has the opposite effect? Write an account of your experience, being careful to let the reader understand why your intention failed.

V. CONCLUSION

Einstein's Self-Portrait from Out of My Later Years

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What difference between the outer life of a person and the inner is suggested here? Would the existence of an inner life provide a good reason for writing an autobiography, since no one else can know it? --Only the individual knows about his own inner life and hence only he can write about it, and by writing, discover it more fully.

2. Explain the last sentence: how can solitude become delicious? Does Einstein mean physical solitude or some other kind? -- Every individual is alone; by discovering his solitary state, he also discovers his individuality.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Does Einstein seem to be denying the value of autobiography? If so, he is expressing only his own view. Write either a defense of autobiographical writing or a criticism of it.

2. Of the people whose lives you have glimpsed here, Einstein is the only scientist. In what ways are his reactions to the circumstances of his life different from the others? Would you say this is generally true of scientists as opposed to writers? If so, can you explain it?